



SHOULDER-A-COFFIN
KURO
3

SATOKO KIYUDUKI



An unusual evening.
Under the unusual moonlight...
An unusual someone.
And a somewhat unusual conversation is had.

Characters

Shoulder-a-Coffin Kuro

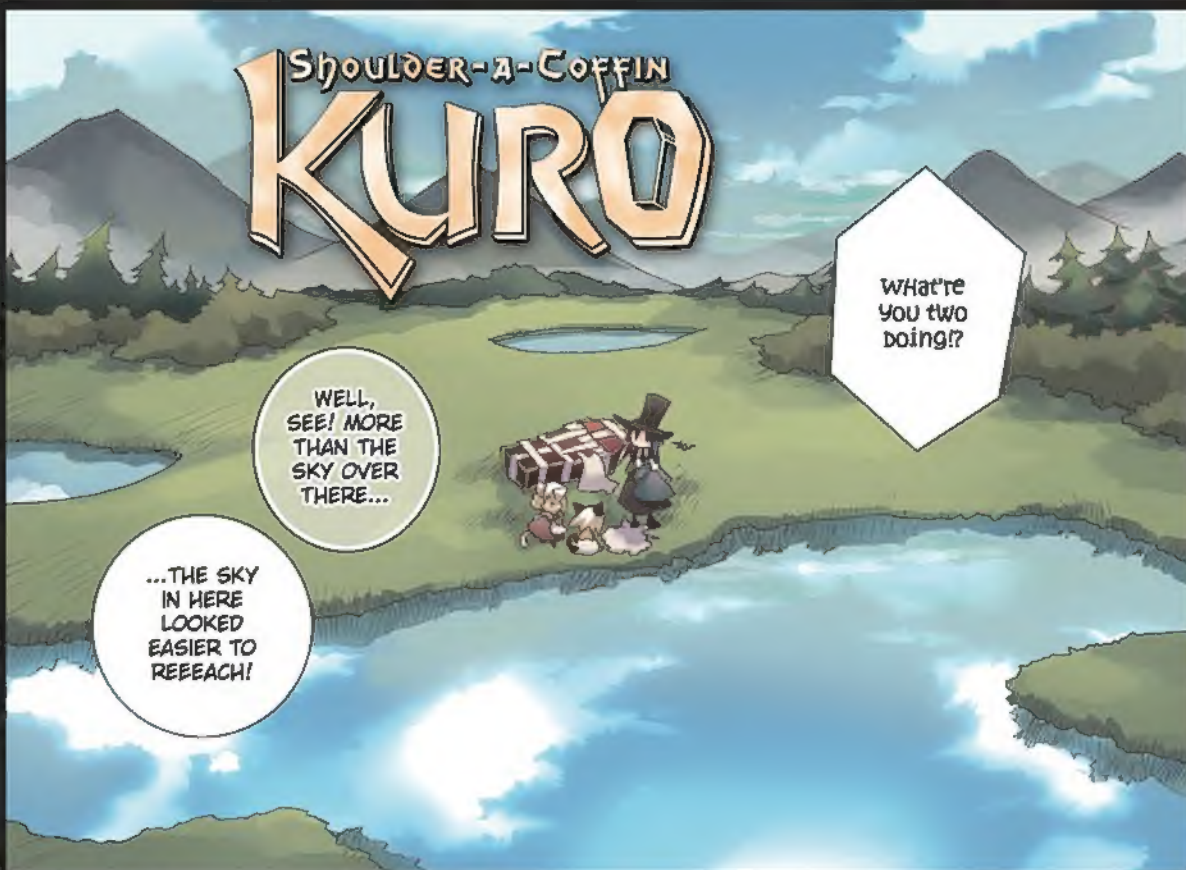
Sen
(partner)

Kuro
(protagonist)

Nijuku
(man-made)

Sanju
(man-made)



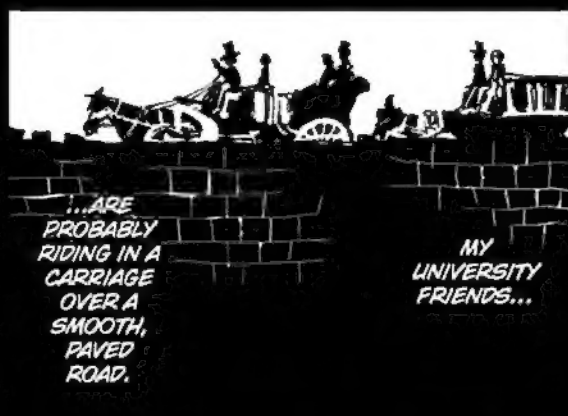








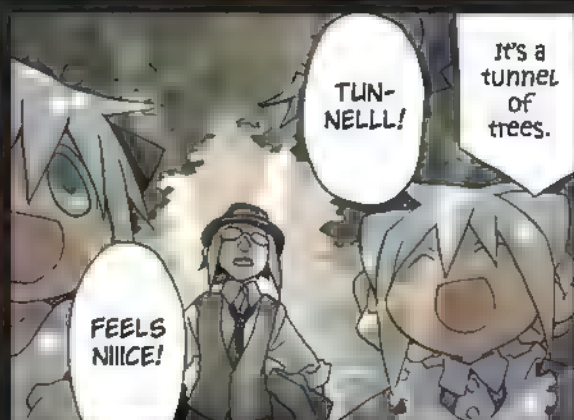






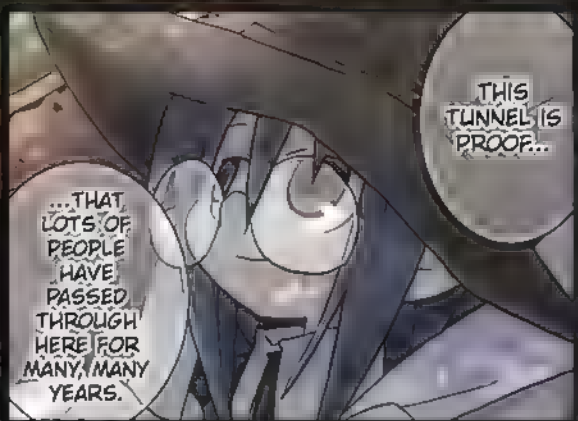
CLEAR THE BRANCHES AND TREES, AND IF THEY GROW BACK, CLEAR THEM AGAIN.

THAT'S REPEATED OVER THE COURSE OF NUMEROUS DECADES.



It's a tunnel of trees.

FEELS NIICE!



THIS TUNNEL IS PROOF...



NO.

IS IT NATU-
RAL?









LOTSA
PEOPLE
INSIDE.

LOTSA
PICTURES.



OH, SHE'S
SULKING.

JUST
THE TWO
OF US.

WE'RE
GONNA
'SPLORE!



DUNNO,
BUT IT'S
SOME-
THING
SCARY.

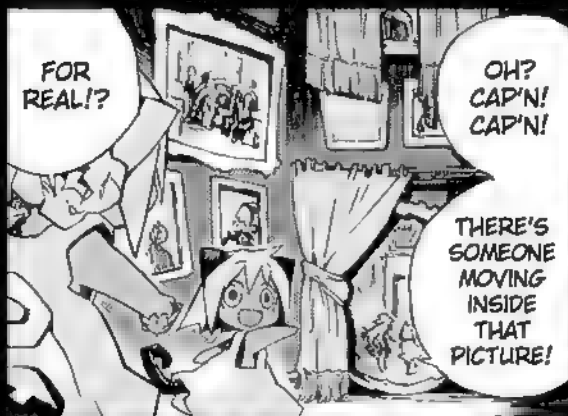
WHAT'S A
GHOST?

THEN
THIS
IS THE
"GHOST
ROOM"!



REALLY!?

I'LL LET
YOU BE
"CAP'N"
TODAY,
SANJU.



FOR
REAL!?

OH?
CAP'N!
CAP'N!

THERE'S
SOMEONE
MOVING
INSIDE
THAT
PICTURE!



"SWAMP
ROOM"?

LET'S
CROSS THIS
"SWAMP
ROOM"
FIRST—

THEN
WE LEAVE
FOR OUR
'SPLORA-
TION!



AYE,
CAP'N!

WE NEED
TO CROSS
USING HIGH
PLACES.

YEAH. THE
FLOOR IS A
"SWAMP,"
SO WE'RE
GONNA
SINK.







It means that she's fostering a sense of self.

Well, it's a good thing.

OH, BOY. IT'S BEEN A WHILE SINCE SHE'S GOTTEN SO TICKED OFF AT ME.



WE SHOULD BE READY TO LEAVE AT ANY TIME.

BUT LET'S WAIT IT OUT A BIT LONGER.

There's a will in the rain.



THAT'S WHY IF THOSE TWO DO IT ON PURPOSE, I GOTTA GIVE UP.

WELL, YEAH!

...you're losing face as their guardian.

But for you to not be able to distinguish between them...



I'M SURE THEY'RE PLAYING SOMEWHERE IN THE HOUSE.

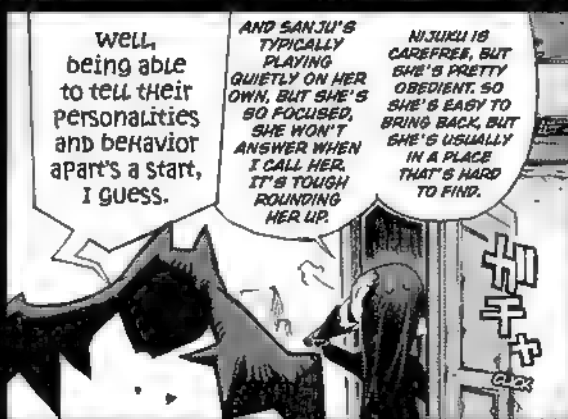
I'LL GO LOOK FOR THEM.

So where'd those two go off to?



...AS THEIR GUARDIAN.

BESIDES, I'VE NEVER THOUGHT OF MYSELF...



Well, being able to tell their personalities and behavior apart's a start, I guess.

AND SANJU'S TYPICALLY PLAYING QUIETLY ON HER OWN, BUT SHE'S SO FOCUSED, SHE WON'T ANSWER WHEN I CALL HER. IT'S TOUGH ROUNDING HER UP.

NIJUKU IS CAREFREE, BUT SHE'S PRETTY OBEIENT. SO SHE'S EASY TO BRING BACK, BUT SHE'S USUALLY IN A PLACE THAT'S HARD TO FIND.



WE MAY BE TRAVELING TOGETHER NOW...

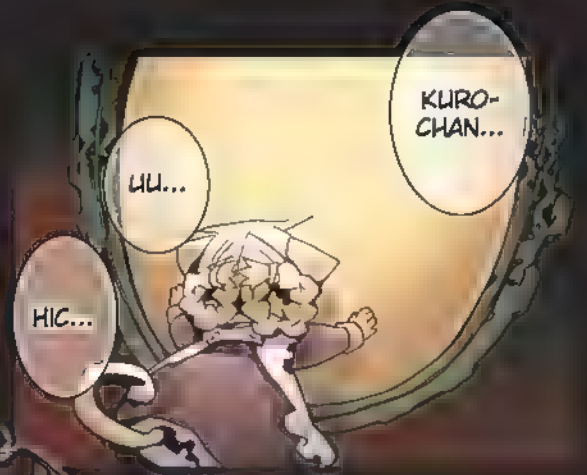
...BUT ONE DAY, WE'RE GOING TO GO OUR SEPARATE WAYS.







HEY!!



UU...

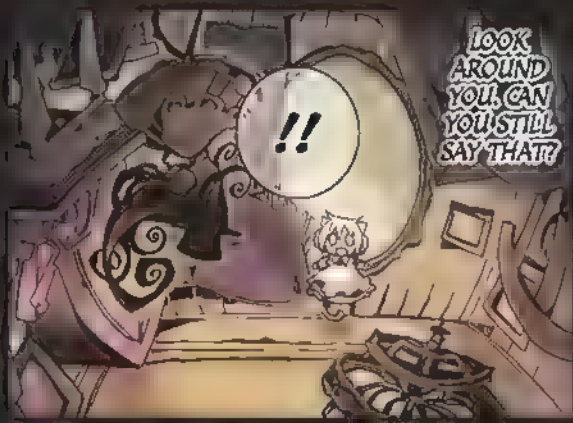
HIC...

KURO-
CHAN...



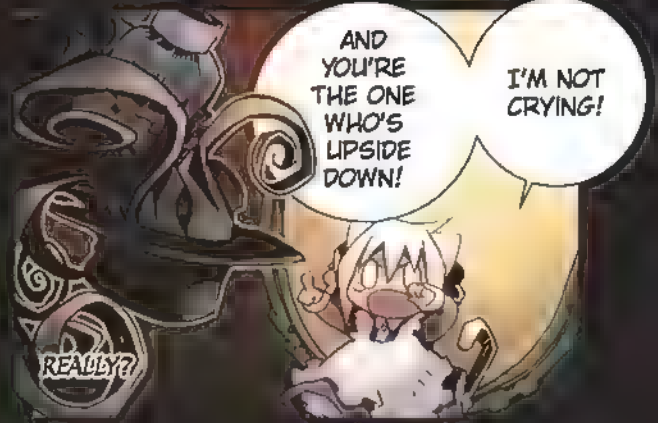
CRYING
UPSIDE
DOWN?

WHY
ARE
YOU...



!!

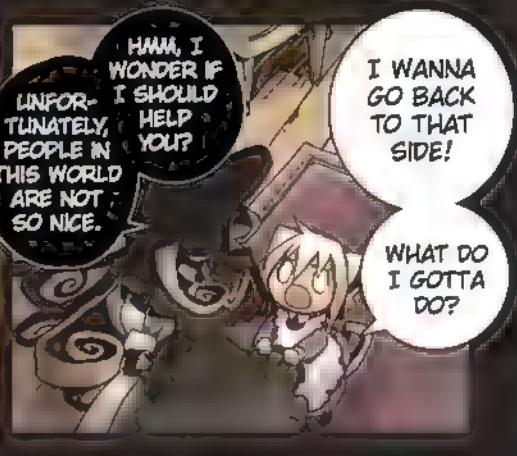
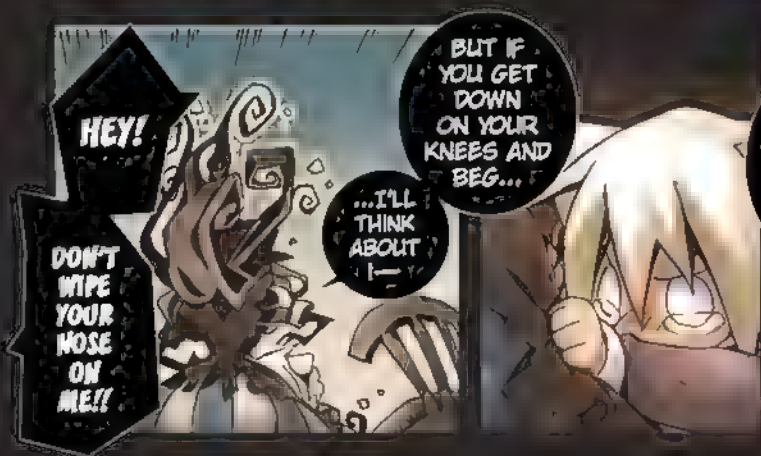
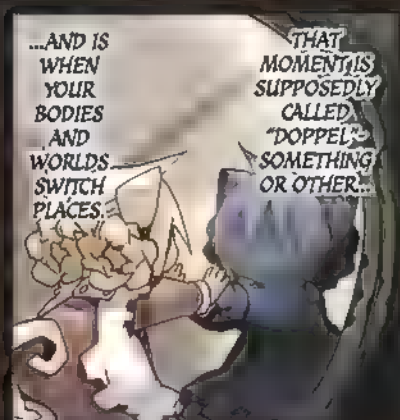
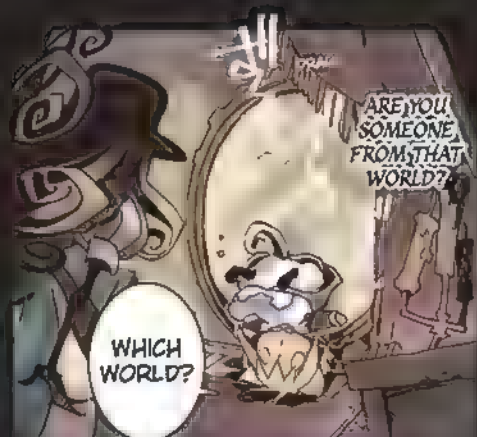
LOOK
AROUND
YOU. CAN
YOU STILL
SAY THAT?



AND
YOU'RE
THE ONE
WHO'S
UPSIDE
DOWN!

I'M NOT
CRYING!

REALLY?





WHAT'S WRONG?

NOTHIN'!



YOU MUST BOTH LOOK INTO THE MIRROR, JUST LIKE WHEN YOU CAME TO THIS WORLD.

I GUESS I'VE GOT TO GIVE YOU A HAND.

THERE'S ONLY ONE WAY TO RETURN.



OH, ONE OF SEN.

I ALMOST STEPPED ON THIS.



SO FIRST...

...WE HAVE TO LOCATE YOU IN THE OTHER WORLD.



WELL, THERE'S ONE RIGHT THERE, SEE?

IT WOULD BE HANDY IF I COULD DIVIDE MY BODY IN TWO OR THREE.



THEY ARE IN THE WEST WING

DO YOU KNOW WHERE THE GUESTS FROM THE OTHER SIDE ARE?

!?



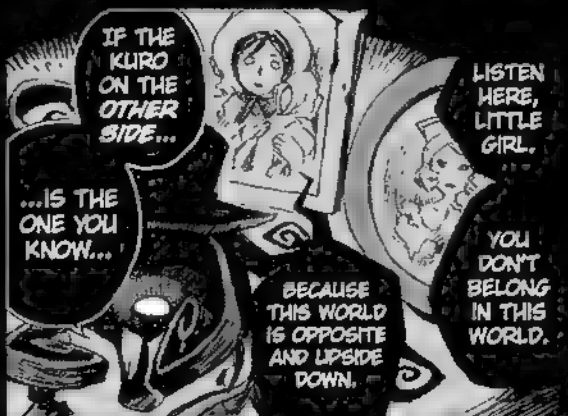
THAT'S JUST ME IN THE MIRROR.

BUT GEEZ, THIS PLACE SURE IS FULL OF MIRRORS, HUH?

LOOK, ANOTHER KURO-CHAN!



DID I JUST HEAR SEN?







IT'S YOUR FAULT.

WE WERE BANISHED FROM THAT PICTURE BECAUSE OF THE FUSS YOU CAUSED.

HEY, WE'RE IN A DIFFERENT ROOM THAN BEFORE.

AND KURO-CHAN ISN'T HERE!



I KNEW IT.

SHE'S PLANNING TO COVER ALL THE MIRRORS IN THE MANSION

...AND BLOCK THE WAY BETWEEN THIS WORLD AND THAT WORLD.



THAT'S ...

SOMEONE'S COME IN.

IT'S NIJUKU!



IT'S NO USE. WE'RE INSIDE A PICTURE.

KURO-CHAN!! SEN!!

THEY WON'T HEAR YOU SHOUTING.



I TOLD YOU BEFORE.

NIJUKU! NIJUKU! NIJUKU!

NO MATTER HOW MUCH YOU SCREAM



HEY, STOP IT!!

THEN I'M GONNA GET OUT FROM HERE!

THE PAINTING WILL BE RUINED!!

IF I JUST MAKE A HOLE, I CAN GO TO THE OTHER SIDE!!



EH? SHE NOTICED ??

SANJU?

IS THAT YOU?!



YOU'RE RIGHT. IT'S A PRETTY VIOLENT SCENE.

BUT LOOK, THERE'S A HISTORICAL PAINTING TOO.

I THOUGHT THERE WERE ONLY PORTRAITS HERE.









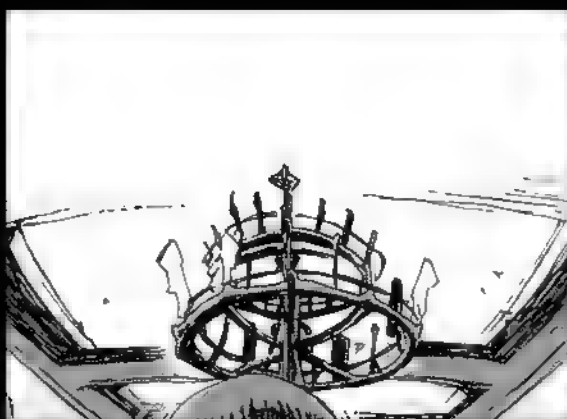


Hey.

CAN'T
TELL
YOU.

I PROMISED
TO KEEP IT
SECRET.

SO
WHAT WAS
THAT ALL
ABOUT?



I'LL LET
KURO-CHAN
KNOW FROM
NOW ON.

IT'S
OKAY.

AND IN THE
END, KURO
STILL CAN'T
TELL YOU
GUYS
APART.



...I'LL
TELL YOU,
WHICH IS
"ME."

UNTIL
YOU CAN
TELL US
APART...

...AS
MANY
TIMES
AS IT
TAKES.

I'LL
TELL
YOU...



...AM
HERE.

'KAY?

"I"...



.....I
GUESS.

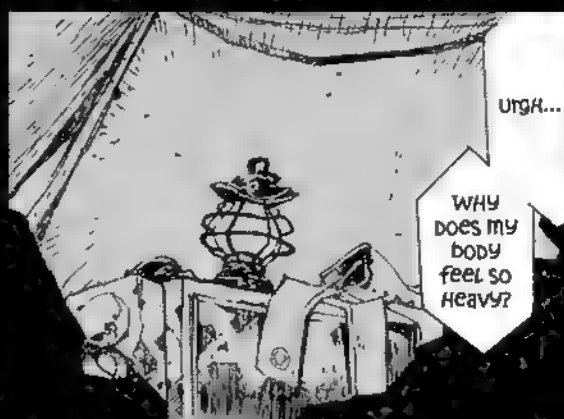
THE
REAL
PAIR...

...right?

UWAH!
SANTU,
DON'T BLOW
YOUR NOSE
ON ME!











YOU
FIGURED
IT OUT?

...NO
ONE WAS
EVER OUT
ON THIS
NIGHT.

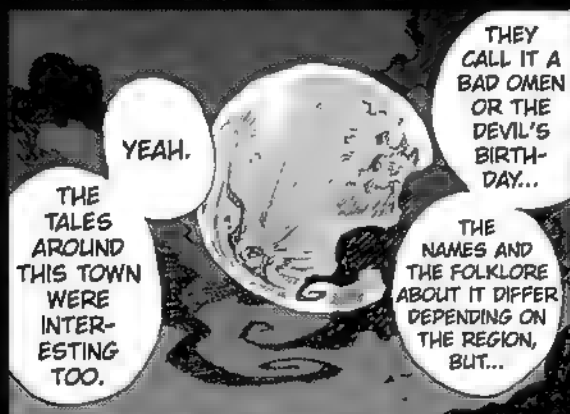
ALL THE
PLACES WE
VISITED...



IT
WASN'T
MUCH.

I JUST
COLLECTED
THE FRUIT
FROM THIS
TREE.

HOW'D
YOU GET
THE
MONEY?



YEAH.

THE
TALES
AROUND
THIS TOWN
WERE INTER-
ESTING
TOO.

THEY
CALL IT A
BAD OMEN
OR THE
DEVIL'S
BIRTH-
DAY...

THE
NAMES AND
THE FOLKLORE
ABOUT IT DIFFER
DEPENDING ON
THE REGION,
BUT...



AND
THE PEOPLE
IN TOWN DIDN'T
KNOW WHERE
THE OIL COMES
FROM, SO
THEY WERE
SURPRISED
I GOT THE
FRUIT
HERE.

IT TURNS
OUT THAT
YOU CAN
GET FINE
OIL FROM
THE PITS.

I USED TO
PICK THIS
FRUIT BACK
HOME, BUT
I NEVER
KNEW
THAT.



WHEN GOD
MADE THIS
WORLD A
LONG TIME
AGO...

...HE PUT
THE EVIL OF
THE EARTH IN
THE STARS BIT
BY BIT, SO IT
WOULDN'T ALL
BE IN ONE
PLACE.

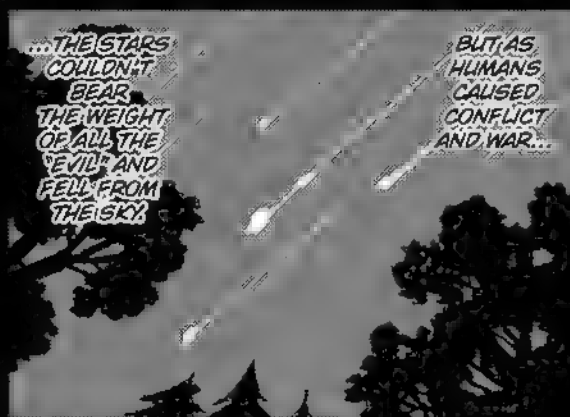
WELL
ISN'T THAT
TROUBLE-
SOME...



THERE
WERE LOTS
OF YOUNG
LADIES IN
BEAUTIFUL
CLOTHES.

IT
WAS A
PRETTY
NICE
TOWN.

...OH,
YEAH?



...THE STARS
COULDN'T
BEAR
THE WEIGHT
OF ALL THE
EVIL AND
FELL FROM
THE SKY

BUT AS
HUMANS
CAUSED
CONFLICT
AND WAR...



YOU LITTLE—
IS THIS PAY-
BACK FOR ALL
THOSE OTHER
TIMES??

YOU
KNOW THAT
THEY'RE ALL
CLOSED FOR
TONIGHT!!

YEAH. OH,
AND THERE
WERE BIG
BARS AND
PUBS TOO,
SENSEI.



BUT TO ME...

...IT LOOKS LIKE YOU'RE REJECTING THE MOON'S OFFER AND TAKING ON THE WEIGHT YOURSELF.

WHO KNOWS?



...AND VOLUNTEERED TO ABSORB THE EVIL ONCE A YEAR.

THE KINDLY MOON KNEW SHE HAD TO DO SOMETHING...



YOU WANNA HEAR WHAT I THINK ABOUT YOU CLINGING TO ME...

SAY, KURO.

...BACK THEN?



THE PEOPLE IN THIS REGION STAY INSIDE QUIETLY TO AVOID ADDING TO THE MOON'S BURDEN.

THAT'S WHY THE MOON TAKES IN ALL THE BAD AND GETS SICK ON THIS NIGHT.

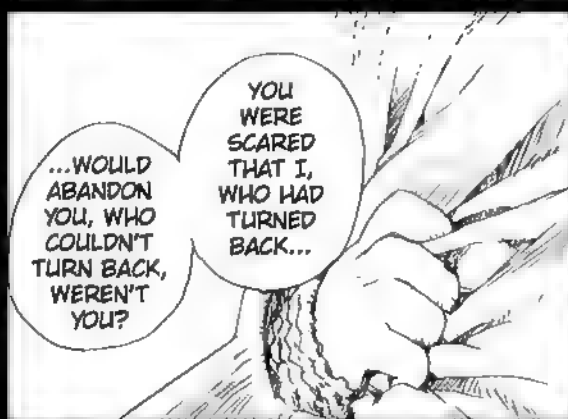


YOU WEREN'T HAPPY TO SEE MY OLD SELF.



PROBABLY.

I SEE. SO JUST FOR TONIGHT, THE MOON'S SHOULDERING MY CURSE.



...WOULD ABANDON YOU, WHO COULDN'T TURN BACK, WEREN'T YOU?

YOU WERE SCARED THAT I, WHO HAD TURNED BACK...



PERHAPS MY CURSE IS TOO MUCH TO BEAR, EVEN FOR THE MOON.

...STILL, I CAN'T RETURN TO HOW I USED TO BE.







THAT'S
WHAT SHE
THOUGHT
AT FIRST.

WHAT
CURIOUS
MAGIC.

TO BE
ABLE TO
CHANGE
SHAPE
INTO ANY
THING...

...SHE
REALIZED
SOMETHING.

BUT
AS SHE
CONTINUED
HER
TRAVELS...

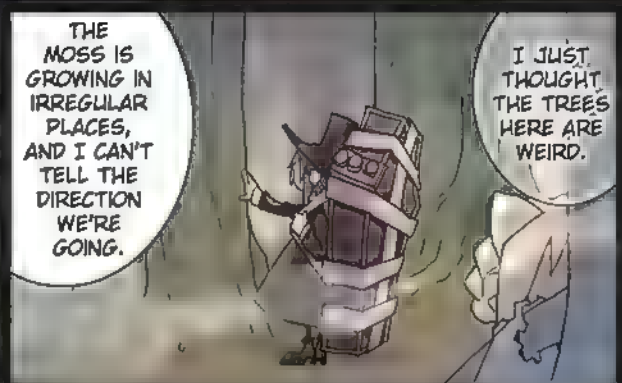
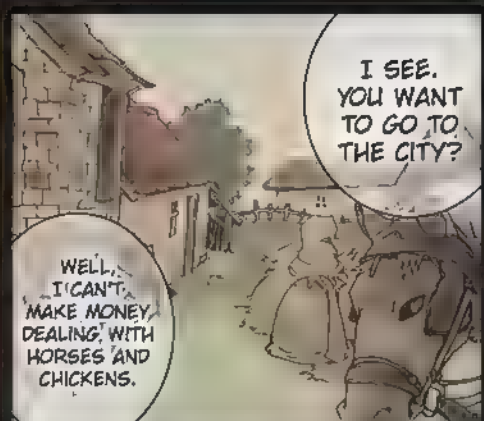
AND
THAT
"POISON"
WAS
SLOWLY
EATING
AWAY
AT HER
BODY.

...WERE
"POISON"
TO HER
NOW.

HER
HUMAN
EMOTIONS
...

...THAT THIS
WAS MOST
DEFINITELY A
"CURSE."

THAT'S
HOW SHE
KNEW...



A forest scene with tall, slender trees. In the lower center, there is a small, multi-tiered, brown structure resembling a beehive or a small house. To its left is a small, brown, furry creature. To its right is a small, round, pinkish creature. A large, oval-shaped speech bubble is positioned on the right side of the image, containing text.

I GUESS
WHAT THE
VILLAGERS
SAID WAS
TRUE.



THIS
FOREST
CONFUSES
PEOPLE...

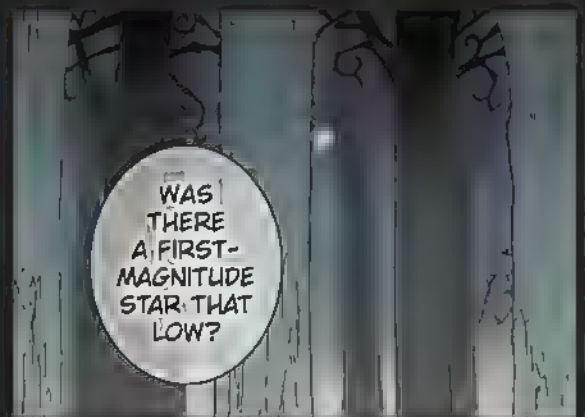
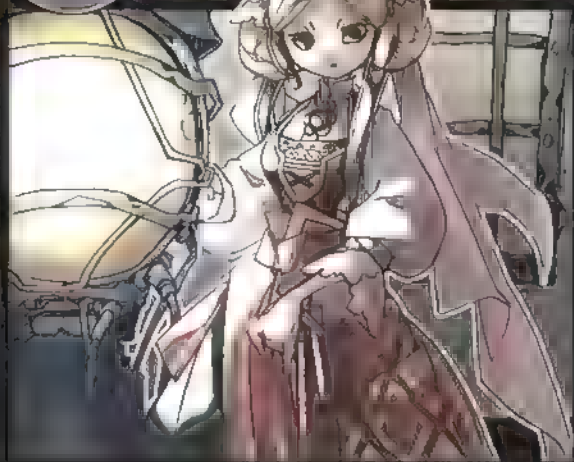
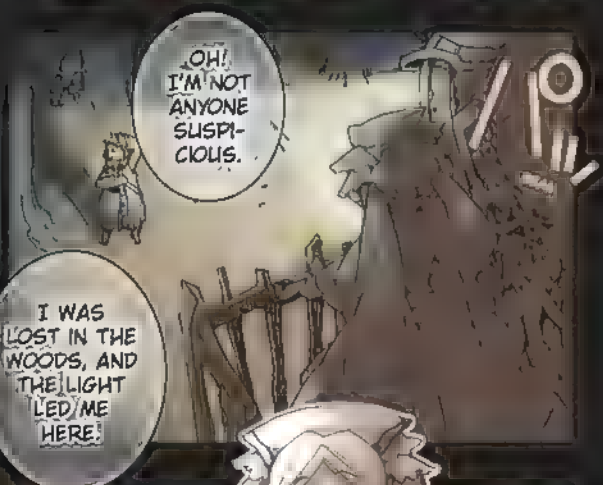
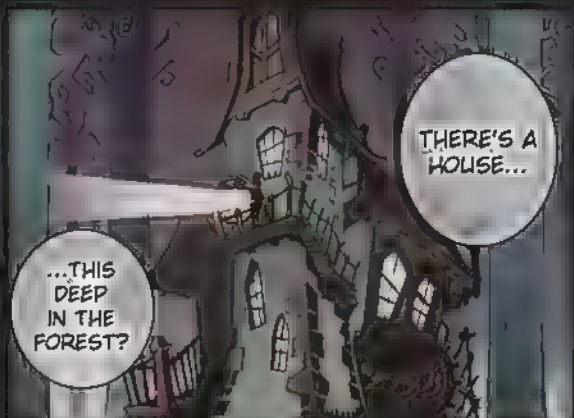
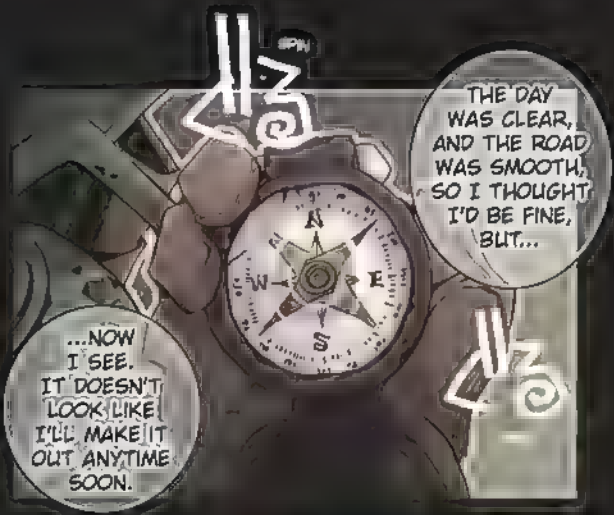
...AND
ONCE YOU
WALK IN, YOU
CAN'T GET
OUT.

I GUESS
WHAT THE
VILLAGERS
SAID WAS
TRUE.



THIS
FOREST
CONFUSES
PEOPLE...

...AND
ONCE YOU
WALK IN, YOU
CAN'T GET
OUT.









WHAT IS IT?

WHAT'RE THESE, KURO-CHAN?

OH.



YEAH, YOU'RE RIGHT.

I THINK HE'D BE AN OLD MAN BY NOW.

BUT THIS PICTURE LOOKS PRETTY OLD.



THOUGH...

...THEY AREN'T MOVING ANY-MORE.

HER FRIENDS, MOST LIKELY.



I have not counted the days.

DON'T SAY THAT

HE MIGHT BE DEAD IN THE WOODS.

When did your master take off?



EITHER THEY BROKE, OR THEIR POWER SUPPLY RAN OUT.

OR MAYBE THEY WERE LIKE THIS TO BEGIN WITH.

THEY USED TO MOVE?

HOW COME THEY DON'T MOVE NOW?



58,018TH TIME...

But to go by the windings of my spring ever since his departure...

...the last one was my 58,018th time.

So roughly eighty years?



...BUT WHY DO THEY LOOK SO SAD?

THAT'S ALL THERE IS TO IT...



YEAH, HE PROBABLY WON'T BE COMING BACK...

THAT MEANS ...



A CHANCE
TO GO
PUBLIC
WITH ALL
OF YOU.

THE TIME
HAS FINALLY
COME FOR MY
EFFORTS TO
BEAR FRUIT.



YOU'RE
RIGHT. THE
TREES ARE
MOVING A
LITTLE.

Look
beyond
the light
over
there.



STAY!
HERE
UNTIL I
RETURN.

I'M
GOING TO
LEAVE FOR
A WHILE!

CREAK
CREAK
CREAK
CREAK



SO YOUR
MASTER
MADE THESE
WOODS
TO KEEP
PEOPLE
OUT.

AND THAT'S
HOW THE
PEOPLE
WHO COME
IN GET
LOST.

Yes.



DO
YOU STILL
BELIEVE...

...THAT
YOUR
MASTER'S
GOING TO
RETURN?



...EVEN
FROM
HERE, YOU
CAN'T SEE
OUTSIDE THE
FOREST.

That is
why it is
extremely
rare for
me to
have
visitors.

Especially
to have
two sets
of visitors,
like
today.



Yes.



I was only
left here
to watch
over the
house.

I do not
know.

I WONDER
WHAT MADE
YOUR
MASTER
LEAVE FOR
EIGHTY
YEARS.



...SHE
MAY
NOT.

SHE
MAY...

...IF
SHE TRULY
DOESN'T
KNOW HER
MASTER'LL
NEVER
RETURN.

I WON-
DER...



I JUST
CAN'T
UNDER-
STAND
IT.

THAT'S
NOT IT.

THERE ARE
NO MORE
WOMEN
OUT THERE
FOR YOU!

DON'T
FEEL SO
DOWN.
SHE'S A
DOLL.



I cannot
do that.



I must
stay
here.

I was
asked to
watch
over the
house.

BUT...

...YOU
MIGHT BE
WAITING
FOREVER.



...UNTIL
SHE
STOPS
MOVING.

SHE'S
GONNA
WAIT FOR
HER
MASTER...



And
knowing
the outside
world is no
concern of
mine.

I cannot
abandon
the tasks
I have
been
given.



HMM.

I'M SURE
THE OLD
MAN DIDN'T
MAKE HER
JUST TO
ROT.

IS SHE
REALLY
HAPPY LIKE
THAT?



...is my
world.

This place
that I share
with my
master...



HEY,
NIJUKU.
SANJU.

MAYBE
WHEN I
FOUND
YOU
TOO...



WHICH
IS HAPPY,
AND WHICH
IS MISER-
ABLE?

WHICH IS
ALIVE, AND
WHICH IS
DEAD?

SHE WHO
WAITS.
SHE WHO
SMILES.

SHE WHO
MOVES.
SHE WHO
STOPS
MOVING.



WHAT,
KURO-
CHAN?

WHAT'S
WRONG,
KURO-
CHA?



...BUT
RATHER
OURS,
WHO
OBSERVE
HER.

THAT'S
NOT HER
STAN-
DARD...



OH.



...DOESN'T
MEAN SHE'D
HAVE THE SAME
STANDARDS AS
A HUMAN.

JUST
BECAUSE
A HUMAN
MADE
HER...



IT'S
NOTHING.

I'LL ASK
YOU TWO
ANOTHER
TIME.



...SOME-
THING
THAT ONLY
SHE CAN
UNDER-
STAND.

HER
HAPPINESS
IS PROB-
ABLY...



It's nice
to have a
clear view
of the sky.

WE'VE
MADE IT
OUT OF THE
WOODS AT
LAST.

SO
THAT
WOULD
BE THE
ROAD
ON THE
LEFT.

When at
a fork in
the road,
follow
the sun.

WHICH
ONE
DO WE
TAKE?

KURO-
CHAN,
THERE
ARE TWO
ROADS.

BYYYE!

BYE,
KEIII!

MAYBE
WE'LL
MEET
AGAIN.

SEE YA,
GUYS.

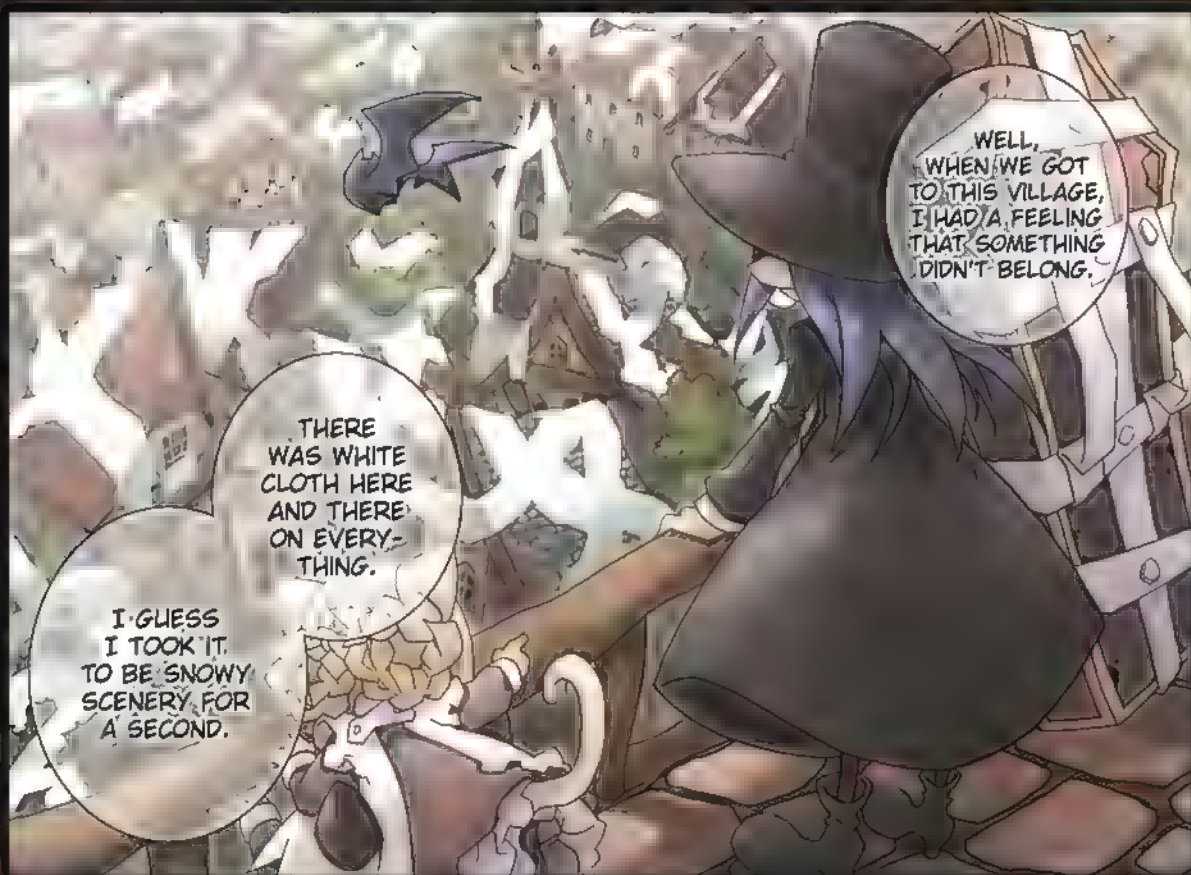
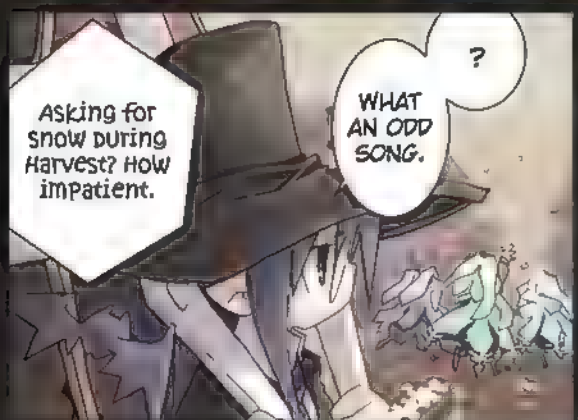
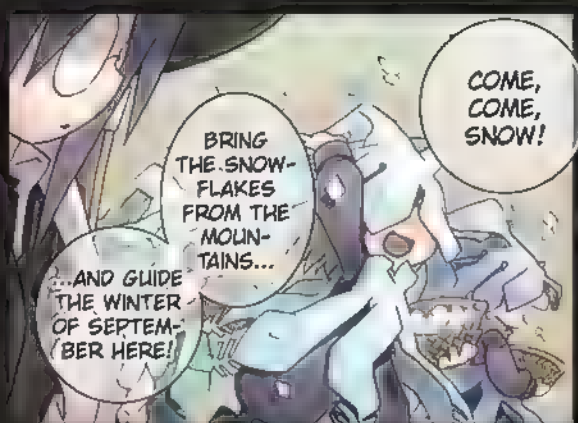
BOO!
VROOM

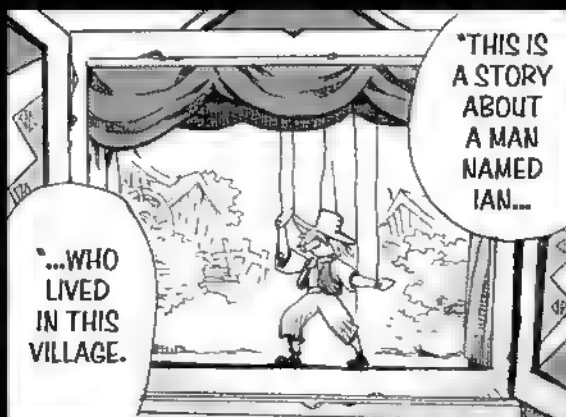
WHY
THIS
WAY?

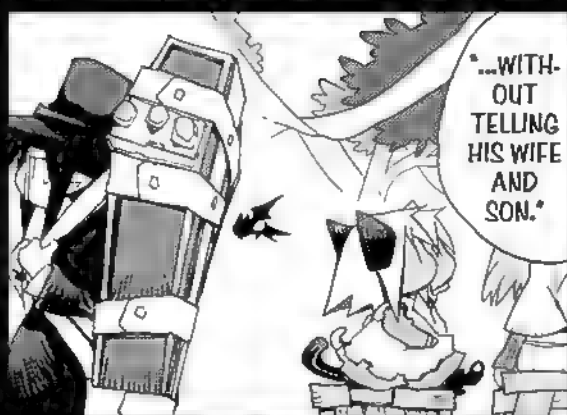
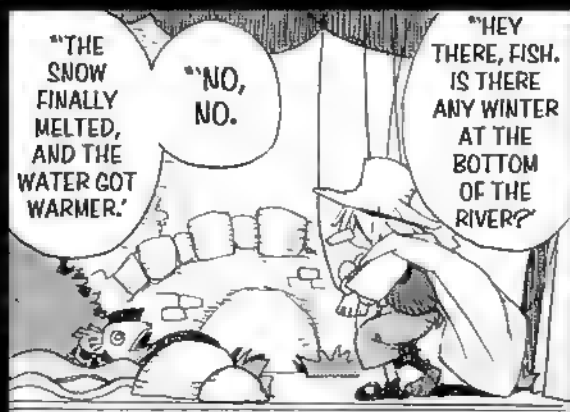
HUH?

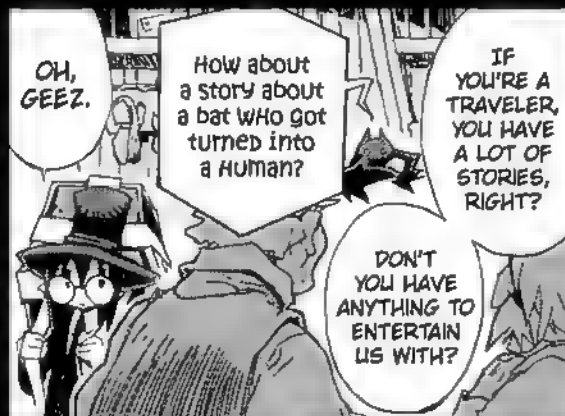


In the end, the child didn't really understand it.
But she gazed intently for a long, long time at the place
where she was said to have been born with the person
who was said to have created her.













"WHEN IAN THOUGHT OF THAT, HIS BURDEN FELT LIGHTER."

"I CAN GO HOME TO MY WIFE AND SON AT LAST."

"BUT IT WASN'T JUST IN HIS HEAD."



THANK YOU.

HERE, I GAVE YOU A LITTLE EXTRA.

SINCE IT'S THE FESTIVAL AND ALL.



"NOT A DROP OF SNOW WAS LEFT IN THE BAG."

"HIS SACK HAD GOTTEN A HOLE DURING HIS LENGTHY TRAVELS."

"AND THE SNOW DROPS FELL OUT."



MOTHER, A TRAVELER WOULDN'T UNDERSTAND.

"SNOW DROPS."

OH? WHAT'S THIS?



"IAN WAS AT HIS END, BOTH MENTALLY AND PHYSICALLY."

"NO, IT CAN'T BE! ALL OF THIS FOR NOTHING."

"HE COULDN'T ENDURE THIS DESPAIR."



.....?

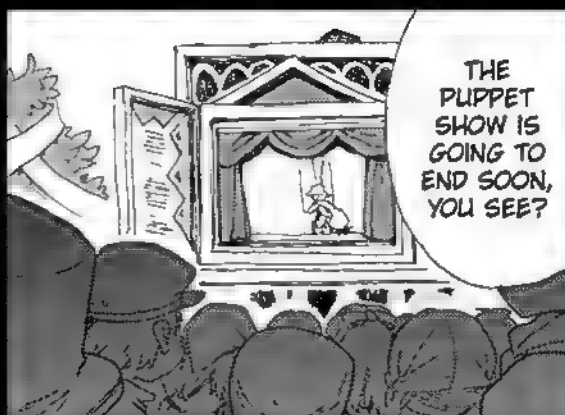
I HEARD YOU HAD CHILDREN WITH YOU.

I'M SURE THEY WILL COME IN HANDY.

THEY'RE JUST THE BITS LEFT AT THE BOTTOM OF THE CANDY JAR.



"AND HE FELL TO THE FLOOR, AS IF IN A DEAD SLEEP."



THE PUPPET SHOW IS GOING TO END SOON, YOU SEE?



THE RETIRED COBBLER?

THE old man there was Ian's son.

You know how we were at the shoe store?



SO CLOSE.

HE WAS CLOSE.

THE PUPPET SHOW wasn't fun?

YOU TWO DON'T LOOK TOO HAPPY.



I'M NOT SURE I WANTED TO HEAR THE BACK-STORY.

His son dramatized the story out of irony.

THE real Ian was a vagabond who didn't care about his family.



I see. So that's how the story ended.

AND THEN IAN DIDN'T WAKE UP.

BUT HE DROPPED ALL THE SNOW.



THAT'S how folk-tales and legends get made.

Well, any tale told by folks is gonna change over time.



REALLY?

WHO TOLD YOU THAT?

THAT tale's based on a true story, but it has made-up bits in it too.

Don't be so down.



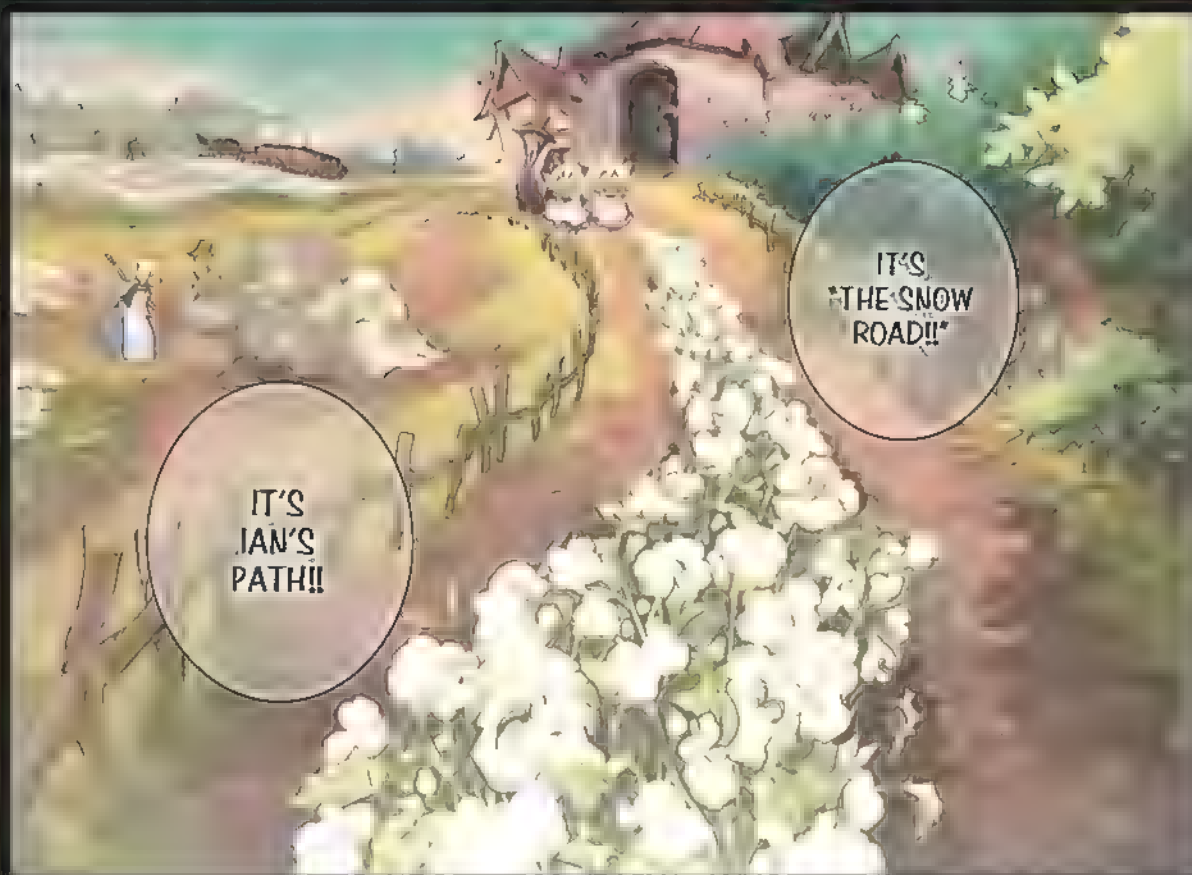
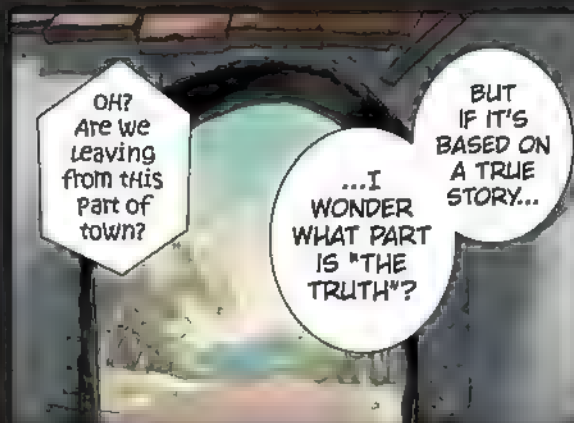
...featuring a coffin-toting traveler with two children.

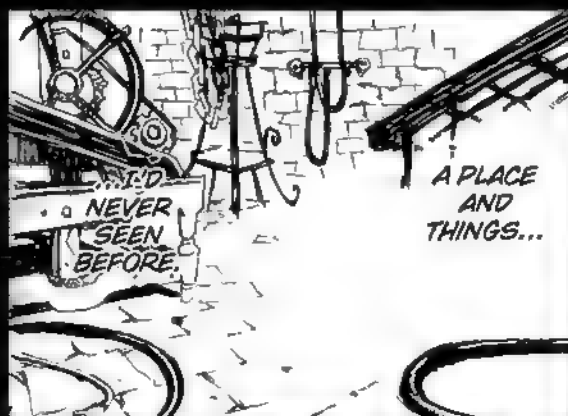
I'm sure there's at least one tale out there...



HUH?

An actual person from the story.





THEY ARE
RATHER
UNSTABLE.



SOMETIMES
THEIR HAIR
GROWS
DRASTI-
CALLY,
OR THEIR
LIMBS
COME
OFF.

...IS A
RECORD
OF MY
EXPERI-
MENTS,
NUMBERS
"29" AND
"30."



WHAT
I AM
WRITING
HERE...

EVEN
WHEN I
CUT HER
HAIR,
THERE
WAS NO
CHANGE.



AFTER
A WHILE,
THE
SITU-
ATION
FOR "29"
STABI-
LIZED.



U.U.

WHAT'S
WRONG?

"30"?

U.U.



TO MAKE
RECORDING
THE DAILY
CHANGES
EASIER,
I DECIDED
TO TIE
"30"'S
HAIR.



OH, IT
CAME OFF
AGAIN?

THAT'S
WHY I
TOLD YOU
NOT TO
STRAIN
YOURSELF.

.....



HEY,
HEY.

I WONDER
WHAT
THIS
MEANS?

GROW GROW GROW

IT HAS
BEEN
AN ODD
EXPERI-
ENCE,
BUT AN
INTER-
ESTING
ONE AS
WELL.



YOU
WEREN'T
WITH
"29"?

AND
YOUR
HAIR'S
GROWING
AGAIN.

A WEEK
HAS
PASSED
SINCE
THE TWO
STARTED
MOVING.









YEAH.

IS IT
ALREADY
"GOOD
NIGHT"
TIME?



HOW IS
YOUR
"FACE"
SUITING
YOU?

OH,
IT'S
YOU.

HELLO.
IT'S
BEEN A
YEAR.



"DESIRE"?

FOR
THE NEXT
EXPERI-
MENT...
...DO YOU
HAVE ANY
DESIRES?



BUT
MY VISION
ISN'T AS
GOOD AS
IT WAS
BEFORE.

IT'S
DOING
FINE.
NO PRO-
BLEMS.



OKAY,
PROFES-
SOR.

SO YOU
TWO GIVE
IT SOME
THOUGHT.

I'VE
ALREADY
DONE ALL
I CAN
THINK OF.



BUT
PERHAPS
IT MEANS
I'M JUST
GETTING
OLDER.

?



...IF WE
HAVE ANY
"DESIRES"?

I
WONDER...



NOPE?

SANJU,
SANJU.

IS
SOME-
THING
ON MY
HEAD?





OR
PERHAPS
BECAUSE
OF YOU,
30 WAS
ABLE TO
RECOVER.

AND YOU
WATCHED
30 FOR
WEEKS
UNTIL HER
CONDITION
IMPROVED.



SOME
CAME
CLOSE TO
LIVING A
LONG TIME
AGO...

ALL OF
THEM ARE
FAILURES
OR GOOD-
FOR-
NOTH-
INGS.



I SEE.

DO YOU
REMEM-
BER
THIS?



YOU
FLOATED
BETWEEN
SUCCESS
AND FAILURE
FOR QUITE
SOME
TIME.

YOU
TWO
WERE
LIKE
THEM
TOO.



...AL-
THOUGH
YOU TWO
HAVE
SEPARATE
LIVES...

...29,
30...

BUT
THAT WAS
WHEN IT
OCCURRED
TO ME
THAT...



I THOUGHT
YOU WOULD
YIELD THE
SAME
RESULT AS
THE OTHER
FAILURES.

AFTER
DAYS OF NO
PROGRESS,
THINGS TOOK
A TURN
FOR THE
WORST.

ONE
MORNING,
ONE OF YOU
STARTED TO
WEAKEN.



IF ONE
OF YOU WAS
NOT HERE,
YOU BOTH
WERE NOT.

...YOU
ARE ONE
IN TWO
BODIES.



...29
WOKE
UP.

BUT
THEN...

FOR
NOW, MY
RECORD
ENDS
HERE.



SANJU.

FOUND
YOU,
PRO-
FES-
SOR!



BUT
HONESTLY,
I DON'T
KNOW HOW
MUCH OF
IT WAS MY
DOING.

THE TWO
GREW
UP TO
BECOME
MORE
THAN I
EXPECTED.



NOW,
LET'S
LEAVE
THIS
ROOM.

IT'S
ALMOST
"TIME."



AND
THEY
WILL
KNOW
"WHAT"
THEY
ARE.

EVENTUALLY,
THEY WILL GAIN
KNOWLEDGE.



I'M
GRANTING
THE
"DESIRE"
YOU TWO
TOLD ME
OF.

WHAT
ARE WE
DOING
TODAY?



...WHAT
EMOTIONS
AND CON-
CLUSIONS
WILL THEY
COME TO?

WHEN
THEY
DISCOVER
THAT
THEIR
VERY
BEINGS
DEFY
PROVI-
DENCE...



AND I'M
FINALLY
READY.

IT WASN'T
EASILY
AVAILABLE,
SO IT TOOK
A WHILE TO
MAKE IT
FROM
SCRATCH.





AND
EVEN
NOW,
PEOPLE
OF THE
HEAVENS
LIVED
THERE...

THE
ENORMOUS
TREE THAT
LOOKED AS
IF IT COULD
REACH THE
HEAVENS
WAS SAID
TO BE THE
FIRST
THING GOD
CREATED.

...AND
OFFERED
TO MAKE A
MYSTERIOUS
"EXCHANGE"
WITH
PASSERSBY.

...EX-
CHANGED
HIS TWO
SONS TO
OBTAIN
A LARGE
TERRI-
TORY.

A FEUDAL
LORD WHO
FRETTERD
ABOUT HIS
IMPOVERISHED
LANDS...

BY
EXCHANGING
"SOMETHING"
ONE HAS...

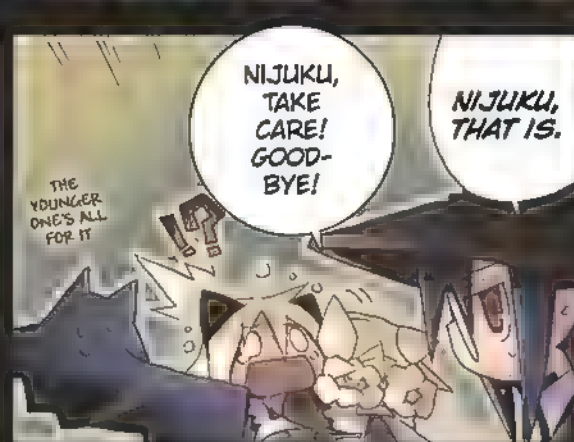
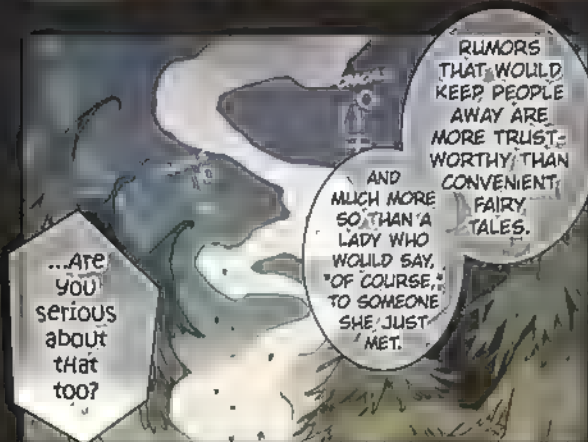
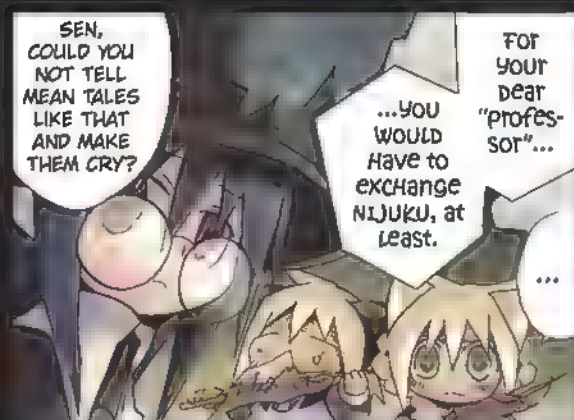
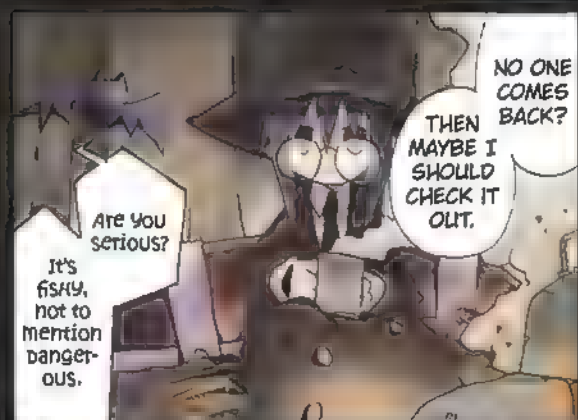
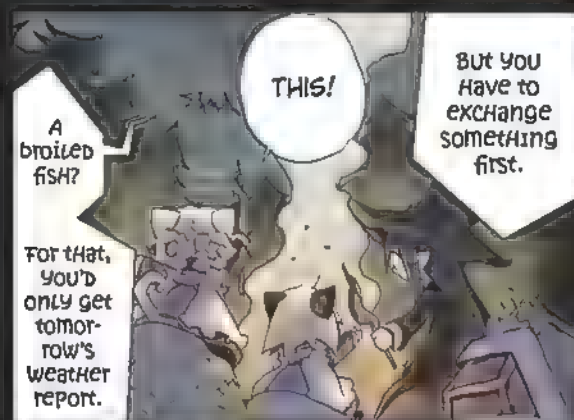
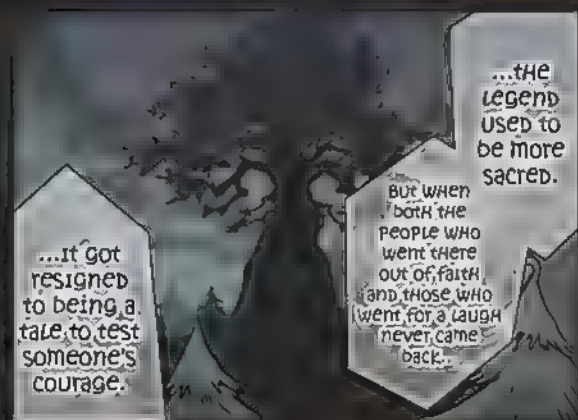
...ONE
CAN OBTAIN
"SOMETHING"
ONE WANTS.

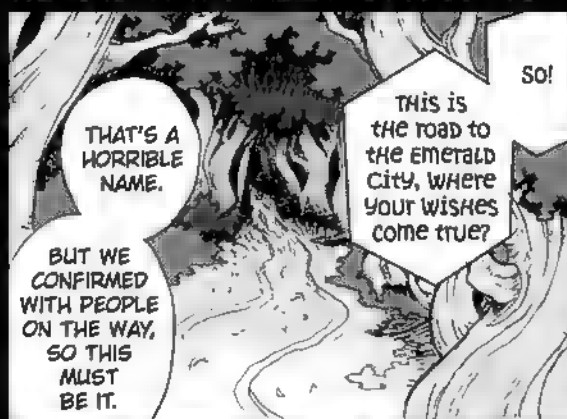
...BARTERED
HIS PEOPLE
FOR...

AND A KING
WITH DARK
AMBITIONS...

...EX-
CHANGED
THEIR CORN
FIELDS FOR
A BABY.

A FARMER
AND HIS WIFE
WHO WERE NOT
BLESSED WITH
CHILDREN...







That's our line.

DON'T SCARE ME LIKE THAT!

UGH, THEY'RE JUST BATS!



YOU GOT IT, BOSS!!

LET'S GO!!

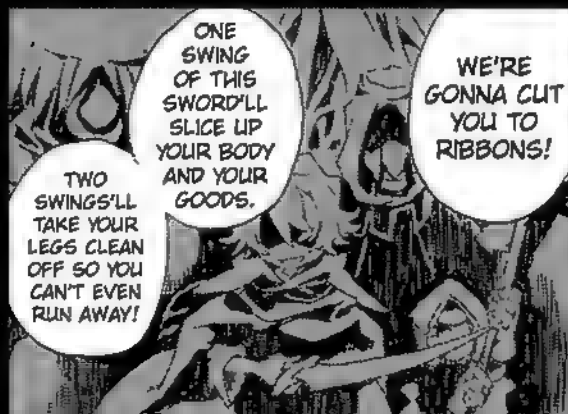


WELL, LEMME TELL YOU!

I DON'T KNOW.

WHO'RE THESE PEOPLE?

WHAT'S THIS, KURO-CHA?



ONE SWING OF THIS SWORD'LL SLICE UP YOUR BODY AND YOUR GOODS.

WE'RE GONNA CUT YOU TO RIBBONS!

TWO SWINGS'LL TAKE YOUR LEGS CLEAN OFF SO YOU CAN'T EVEN RUN AWAY!



IF YOU DON'T WANNA GET SLICED AND DICED...

GET A LOAD OF THIS!!



SO HOW MANY PIECES YOU FEEL LIKE TODAY?

THREE SWINGS, AND YOUR HEAD'LL GO FLYIN', TONGUE STILL IN IT, SO'S YOU CAN'T TALK.

Actually, I hate to break it to you, but...



ARE YOU LISTENING TO ME!?

HOW'D YOU GET DOWN FROM UP THERE?

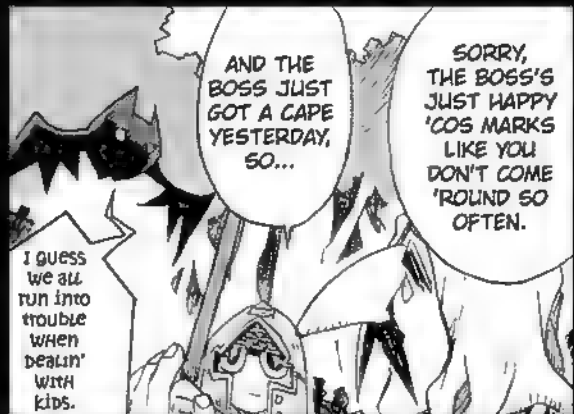
THAT SHINY-SHINY IS COOL!!

You're the one who said to look.



AAAGHH!!

...I'm already in a thousand pieces.





I Have a feeling drinking with them around will be fun.

LET'S PLAY!
LET'S PLAY!

SHEESH. FIRST, THE BOSS, AND NOW THESE TWO. IT'S A HARD JOB DEALING WITH TYKES.

STOP SCURRYING 'ROUND ON TOP OF MY HEAD!



SORRY, THIS IS IMPORTANT. SO I HAD TO PROTECT IT.

BUT NEXT TIME...



HM? WELL...

WHAT BAD THINGS DO YOU DO?

WHAT'S A "BANDIT"?



...YOU SHOULD THINK ABOUT WHAT IT MEANS...

...TO TURN YOUR BLADE AGAINST SOMEONE OR TO TAKE SOMEONE ELSE'S THINGS BEFORE YOU ACT.



WHAP!

Hey, don't hit 'em...

!?

FOR EXAMPLE...



WHaaaaat!?

DON'T THINK I'LL GO EASY ON YOU JUST 'COS YOU'RE A GIRL.



HUH?

? WASN'T ME.

THEN THAT WAS...







...YOU MIGHT THINK THAT THE PATH YOU TOOK WAS THE RIGHT ONE.

OR IF A DIFFERENT BRANCH IS WILTING FROM BEING EATEN BY INSECTS...



EVERY TIME WE MOVE FORWARD, WE CHOOSE ONE BRANCH AMONG MANY.

THE ROUTE WE WALK IS SIMILAR TO A TREE BRANCH.



...IS THE RIGHT ONE FOR ME?

THEN WHICH PATH...



...YOU MIGHT REGRET NOT SELECTING IT AS YOUR PATH.

IF A BRANCH SEPARATE FROM YOURS BLOOMS A BEAUTIFUL FLOWER...



WE'RE HERE.



SANJU,
SANJU!
LET'S
RACE!

LET'S
SEE WHO
CAN GET
THERE
FASTER!

'KAY!



WOW.

WOW!

Wow, it's
huge. So
that's the
tree?



THIS
IS MY
PATH!

NO
FAIR!

YOU
CAN'T
USE IT!

THEN,
THEN...



WHY,
DOROTHY.

WHO
KNOWS?

AND WHEN
IS THE GOD
SUPPOSED
TO COME
DOWN?



LIM...
LMM!



HOW
UNUSUAL
FOR YOU
TO BRING
SOMEONE
HERE.



LIMMM...



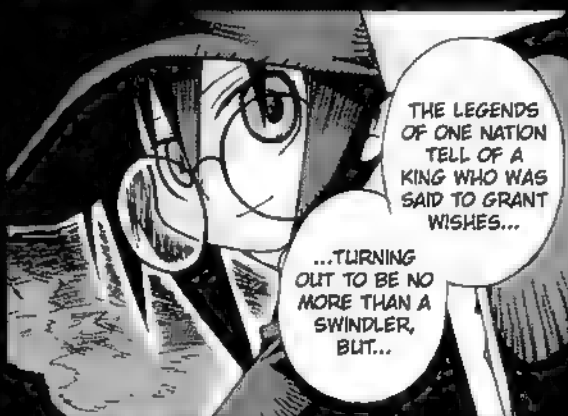
THAT'S
JUST MY
GRANNY.

COULD
THAT
BE—

...I'M
GETTING
THE SENSE
OF
SOMETHING
INHUMAN
FROM HER.

THERE'S
YOUR
WITCH,
KURO.

THAT CRONE
WHO LOOKS
LIKE SHE'S
TURNING
INTO THE
SURROUNDING
TREES...









AND THERE'S NO TELLING THAT THE FEUDAL LORD WOULDN'T SUFFER FROM HAVING SENT HIS SONS TO THEIR DEATHS.

AT THE SAME TIME, THERE'S NO GUARANTEE THAT THE FARMER COULD RAISE A CHILD WITHOUT HIS CORNFIELDS.

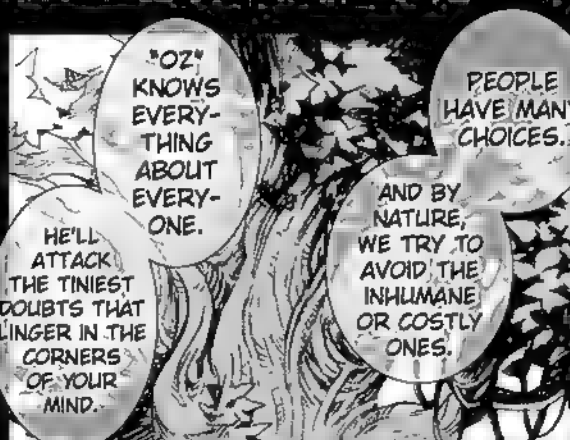


SEN IS...

...SMARTER AND KINDER THAN ME.

ARE YOU SHAKING WITH FEAR?

YOU SHOULD HAVE BROUGHT SEN.



"OZ" KNOWS EVERYTHING ABOUT EVERYONE.

PEOPLE HAVE MANY CHOICES.

AND BY NATURE, WE TRY TO AVOID THE INHUMANE OR COSTLY ONES.

HE'LL ATTACK THE TINIEST DOUBTS THAT LINGER IN THE CORNERS OF YOUR MIND.



YOU'RE RIGHT. THAT WAS SENSIBLE.

SO I THOUGHT IT WOULD BE DANGEROUS FOR HIM.



Isn't that more like the whispers of a devil rather than a god?

IN THERE, YOU CAN SEE THE REAL YOU.



KURO.

IT'S GETTING PRETTY BAD, ISN'T IT?



...IS THE PERSON WHO'S GONE IN THERE.

THE ONE WHO DETERMINES WHETHER A GOD OR A DEVIL LIES BEYOND THE DARKNESS



I THINK IT'S ABOUT TIME YOU GOT DESPERATE.

AND EVEN
IF YOU DO
FIND HER,
YOU DON'T
KNOW IF
SHE'LL BE
ABLE TO
LIFT THE
CURSE.



EVEN
IF YOU
CONTINUE
YOUR
JOURNEY,
YOU DON'T
KNOW IF
YOU'LL
FIND THE
WITCH.

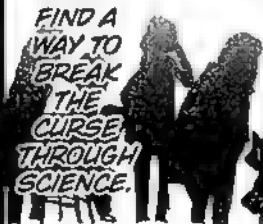
...NIJUKU'S
BODY TURNED
ALL BLACK.



A
LONG
TIME
AGO...

...DUE
TO THEIR
MYSTERIOUS
POWERS...

MAYBE
THEN
YOU
COULD
FIND A
WAY TO
BREAK
THE
CURSE
THROUGH
SCIENCE.



BUT
WHAT
IF YOU
HANDED
THE TWO
OVER TO A
LARGE
RESEARCH
FACILITY?

THAT TIME,
YOU FELT THE
TRUE HORROR
OF YOUR
BODY...

...AND
YOUR
HEART
HURT
FOR THE
CHILDREN.

POOR
KURO.



THEIR
LIVES AREN'T
WORTH MUCH,
SO SURELY YOU
WON'T FEEL
TOO GUILTY,
HMM?



THE TWO
ARE TEST
SUBJECTS,
AFTER ALL.



BUT I KNOW
WHAT ALSO
OCCURRED
TO YOU...

...AT
THAT
TIME.



...TO
FIND THAT
PURPOSE?

...TO THE
OUTSIDE
WORLD...

DO YOU
WANT TO
COME
WITH
US...

MAYBE YOU
BEFRIENDED
THE TWO...

...TO HELP
YOURSELF?

...TO
TRANSFER
YOUR CURSE.

YOU THOUGHT
THAT PERHAPS
YOU COULD
USE THE
TWO...







HUH?
WHAT
ARE YOU
TALKING
ABOUT?

"IT'S A
STRAIGHT
ROAD."

I
GUESS
THAT'S
HOW I
NEED TO
THINK.



HEY,
GRANNY.

I ALWAYS
THOUGHT
WE SHOULD
BURN UP
THIS TREE.

HMM?



well,
no matter
how much
the road
branches
off...

...in the
end, you
can only go
down one
path.

I THINK
PEOPLE DOUBT
THEMSELVES
WHEN THEY
THINK THERE'S
A FORK IN
THE ROAD.

AND YOU
WAVER 'COS
YOU TRY TO
CHOOSE THE
BETTER
WAY.



ALL
KINDS OF
WEIRDOS
COME 'ROUND
WITH CRAZY
THOUGHTS
IN THEIR
HEADS...

...AND
THE BAD
RUMORS
SPREAD
LIKE A
FLU.

HOH-
HOH!
THAT'S
TRUE.



THAT'S
WHY, FROM
HERE UNTIL
THE END, MY
PATH IS ONE
STRAIGHT
ROAD.

RIGHT.



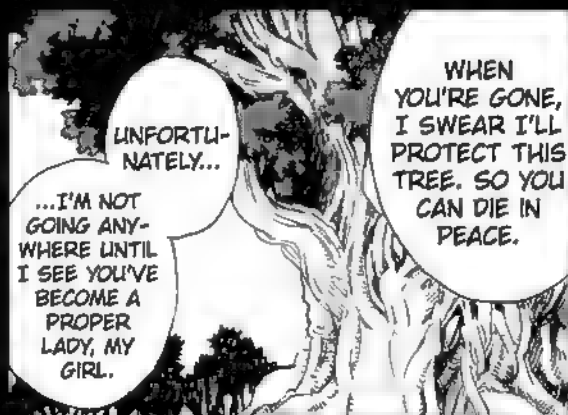
IT
DOESN'T
HAPPEN
A LOT,
BUT...

...
SOMETIMES
PEOPLE WHO
ARE TRULY
LOST COME
BY, LIKE
KURO.

BUT NOW
I KNOW
WHY YOU
KEEP IT
AROUND.



AND
I'LL TAKE
ANYTHING
THAT IT
THROWS
MY WAY.



UNFORTU-
NATELY...

...I'M NOT
GOING ANY-
WHERE UNTIL
I SEE YOU'VE
BECOME A
PROPER
LADY, MY
GIRL.

WHEN
YOU'RE GONE,
I SWEAR I'LL
PROTECT THIS
TREE. SO YOU
CAN DIE IN
PEACE.



HUH?

OH!

HEY,
DOROTHY.



HELLO.

IT'S BEEN
A WHILE.
HOW ARE
YOU?

I
THOUGHT
YOU
WOULDN'T
BE BACK FOR
ANOTHER
TWENTY
YEARS.

OH,
MY.

GRANNY!
IT'S
FUKASHI-
SAN! HE'S
HERE!



BUT
I FELT I
WANTED TO
DROP BY.

I DON'T KNOW
IF IT WAS FOR
CONFIRMATION
OR AS A
WARNING.



WELL,
ANYHOW!
ARE YOU
STAYING
LONG
THIS
TIME?

I
SEE...

THIS PERSON
WAS DRESSED
IN BLACK, AND
EVEN HAD A
BLACK HAT,
AND WAS
CARRYING A
COFFIN...

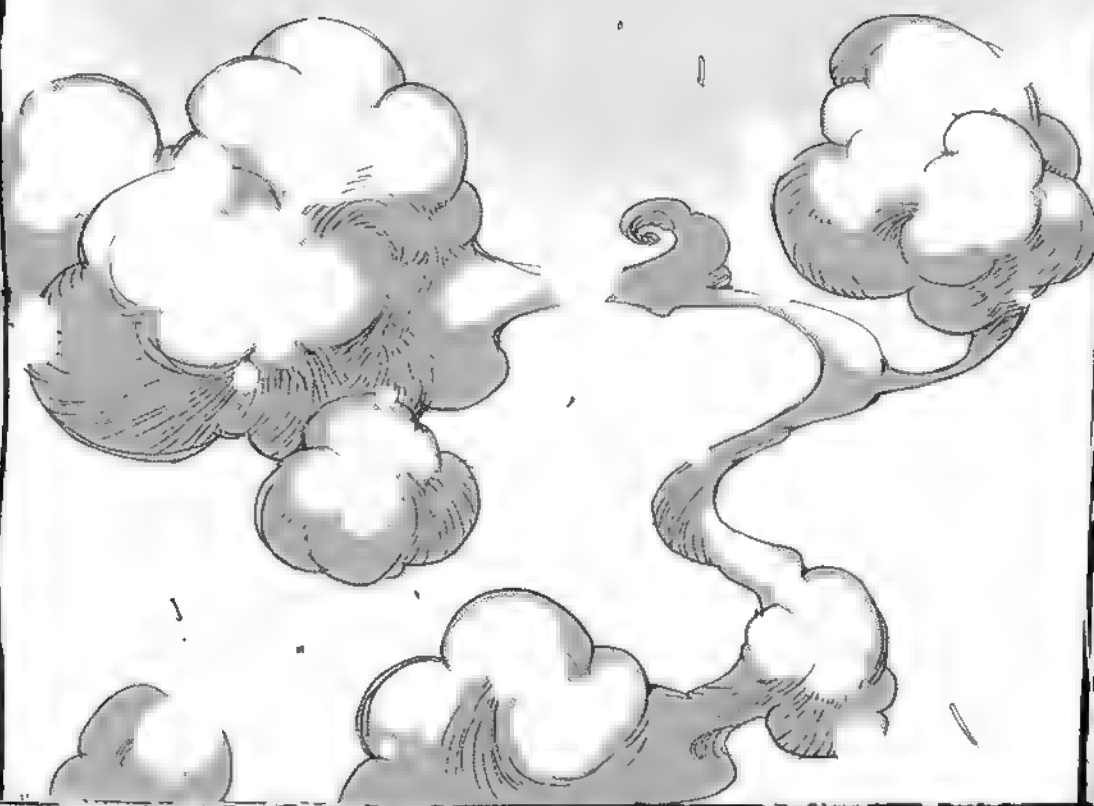
...AND WAS
ACCOMPANIED
BY SOME KIDS
AND A BAT.

LIKE
ME?

THE
OTHER
DAY,
SOMEONE
LIKE YOU
CAME TO
VISIT.

YES.
FOR A
MOMENT,
I EVEN
THOUGHT
IT WAS
YOU.

I WANT
TO HEAR
ALL YOUR
STORIES!



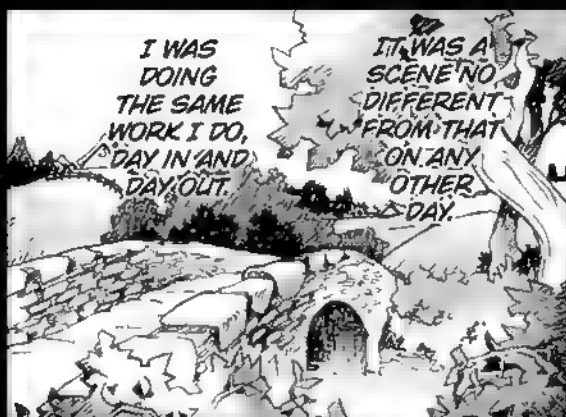
—It came upon them suddenly.



ENO.

BUT ON
THIS
DAY...

WAKE
UP.



I WAS
DOING
THE SAME
WORK I DO,
DAY IN AND
DAY OUT.

IT WAS A
SCENE NO
DIFFERENT
FROM THAT
ON ANY
OTHER
DAY.



A
STRANGE
"SOME-
THING"...



...ENO.

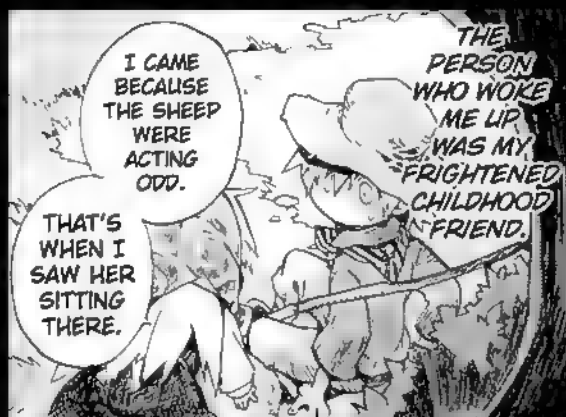
THAT'S
WHY IT
WAS
COMMON
FOR ME
TO DOZE
OFF.



HAD
TAKEN
UP A
SEAT
BESIDE
ME.



... "WITCH"?



I CAME
BECAUSE
THE SHEEP
WERE
ACTING
ODD.

THAT'S
WHEN I
SAW HER
SITTING
THERE.

THE
PERSON
WHO WOKE
ME UP
WAS MY
"FRIGHTENED
CHILDHOOD
FRIEND."



AND SHE
SPOKE
WITH A
VOICE THAT
SOUNDED
LIKE SHE
HAD THREE
THROATS.

WHEN I
LOOKED
AT HER,
HER FACE
WAS
MADE
UP OF
THREE
COLORS.

... HAVE
BEEN
CALLED THIS
MANY TIMES
BEFORE.



IRI LIKES
TO USE
WORDS
SHE JUST
LEARNED.

THERE ARE
"DANGEROUS"
"INCIDENTS"
THAT OCCUR
DURING THE
HARVEST
SEASON.

ENO, YOU
NEED TO
BE MORE
"CAREFUL."



... NOT
BECAUSE
SHE WAS
COWERING
AT THE
SIGHT
OF THIS
CREATURE.

AND MY
CHATTY
FRIEND
BEGAN
GRABBING
AT ME...



HUH?
FOR REAL?

BUT JUST
BETWEEN US,
I KNOW HER
"IDENTITY."

I
"ACCIDENTALLY"
OVERHEARD
GRANDPA LAST
NIGHT.



... AS
SHE SAID
THIS WAS
ONE OF
PROFOUND
SADNESS.

BUT
BECAUSE
HER
EXPRES-
SION...

THEN I
SUPPOSE

... THAT
MAKES
ME A
"WITCH."



BUT
SHE'S STILL
YOUNG, SO
THE BASIS
OF HER
"VOCABU-
LARY" IS
A LITTLE
UNCERTAIN.

YEAH!
THEY CALL
HER A
"WITCH"!

DO YOU
KNOW ABOUT
THE WITCH
WHO TURNED A
PRINCE INTO A
DRAGON?















YOU
SAID
THAT I
WAS...

...A
"GOOD
WITCH."

OH, I
WANTED
TO ASK
YOU.



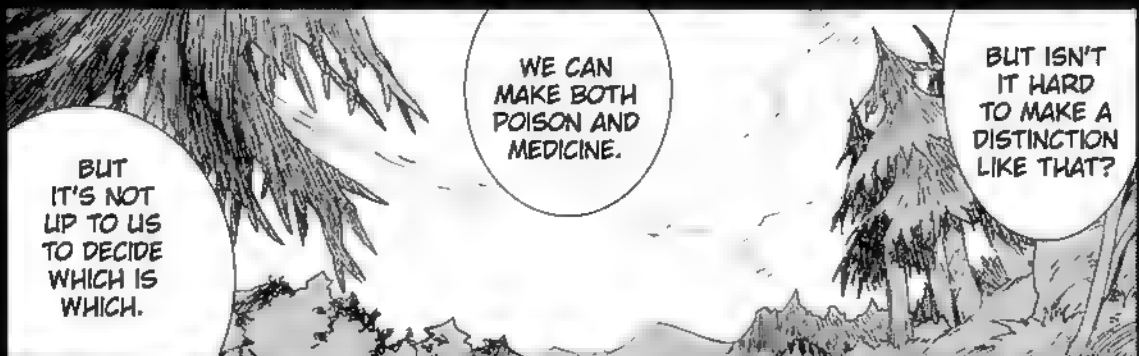
OH.

THAT'S
SIMPLE
ENOUGH.

YOU'RE
A GOOD
PERSON,
SHE'S
A BAD
PERSON.

...FROM
THE WITCH
YOU'RE
LOOKING
FOR?

BUT
HOW AM I
DIFFER-
ENT...



BUT
IT'S NOT
UP TO US
TO DECIDE
WHICH IS
WHICH.

WE CAN
MAKE BOTH
POISON AND
MEDICINE.

BUT ISN'T
IT HARD
TO MAKE A
DISTINCTION
LIKE THAT?

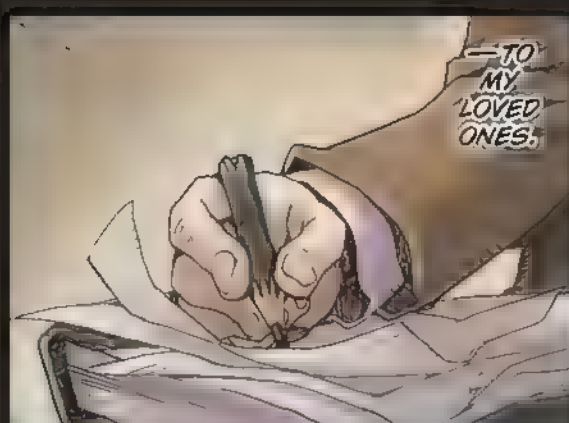


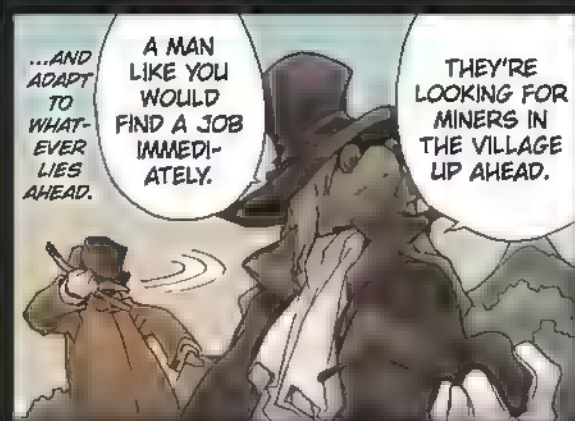
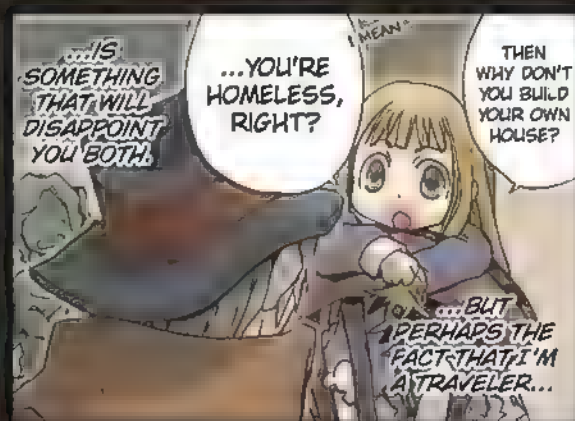
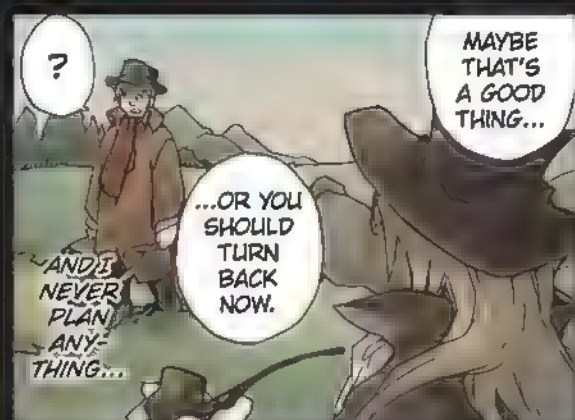
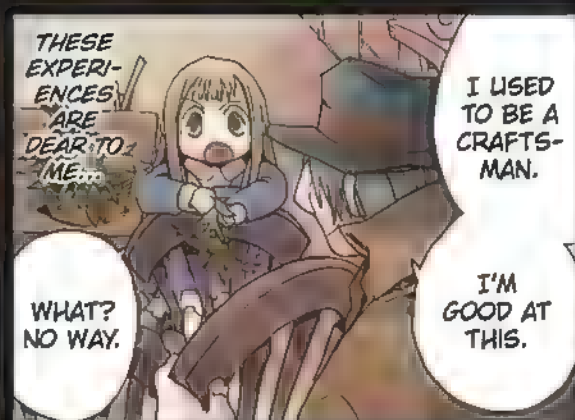
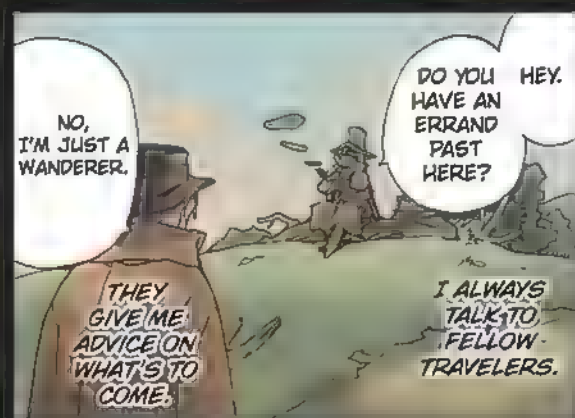
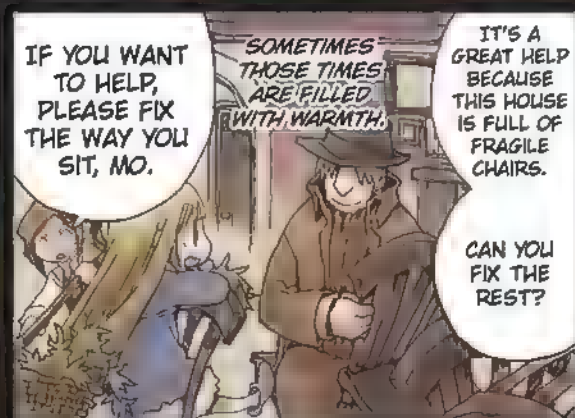
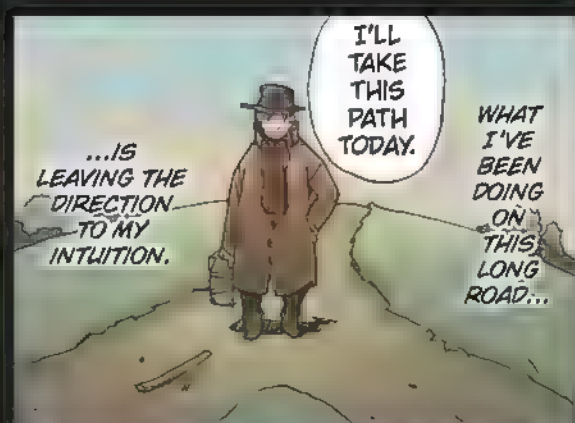
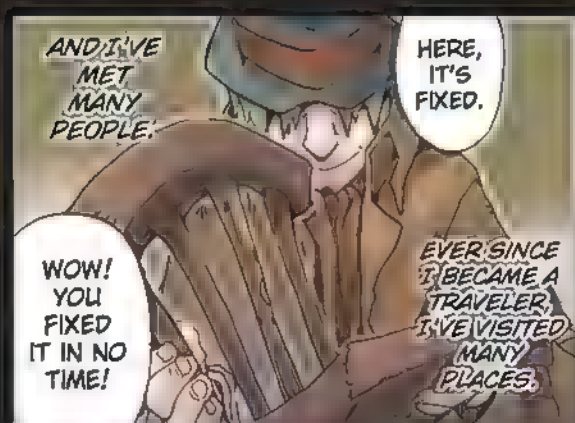
WHEN
SOMEONE
CALLS YOU
ONE, THAT'S
WHEN
YOU'RE A
"WITCH."

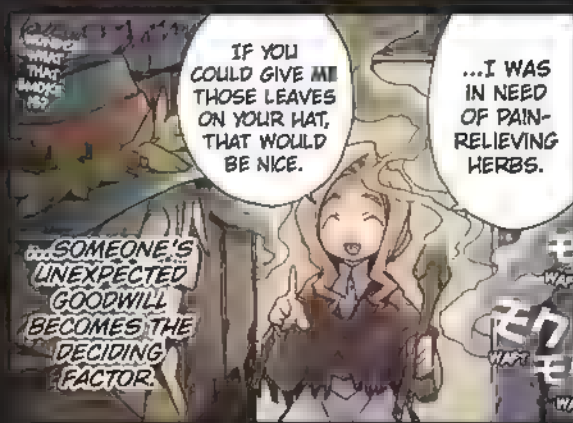
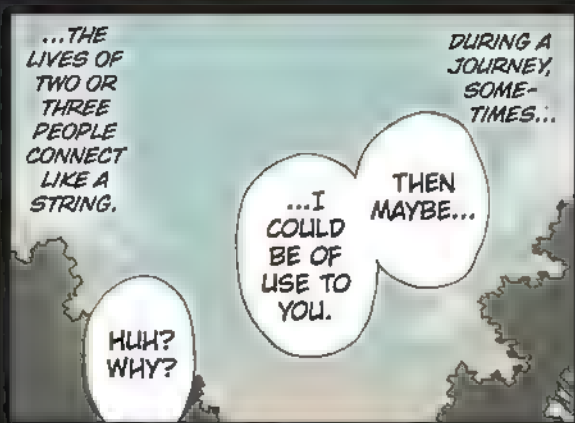
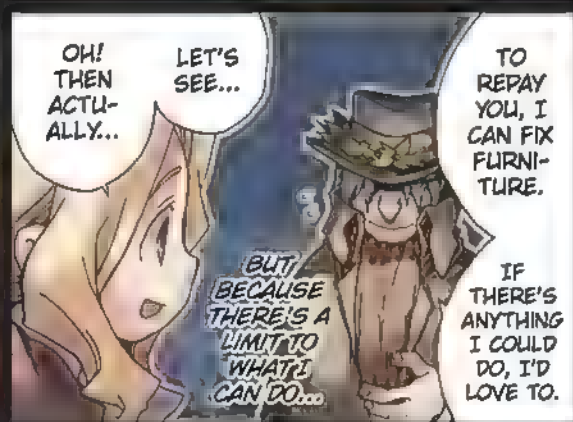
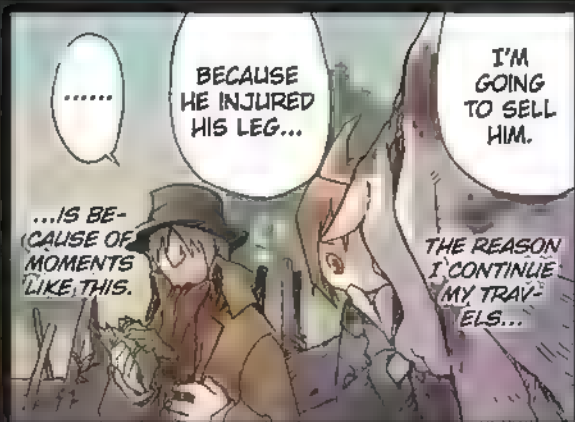
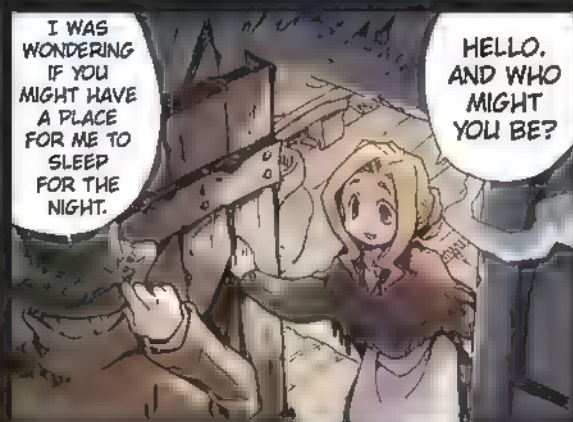
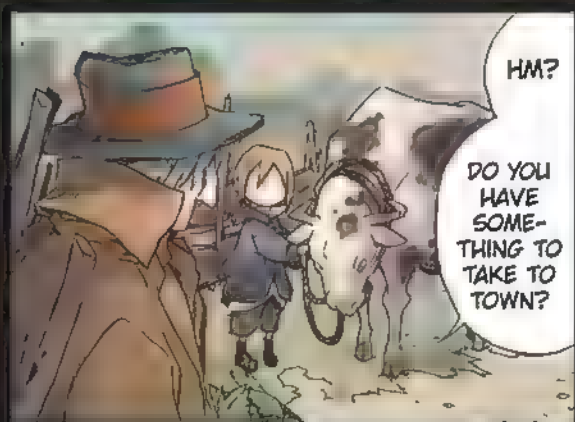
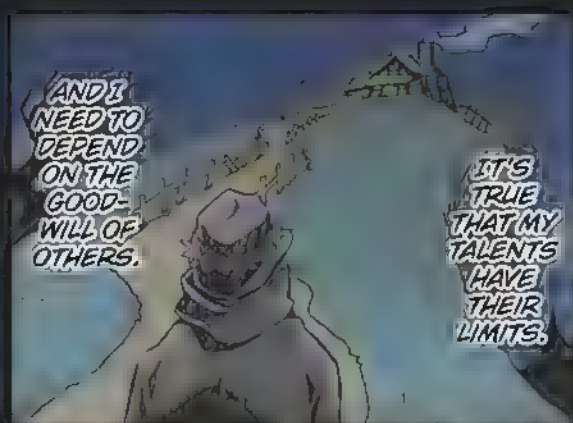
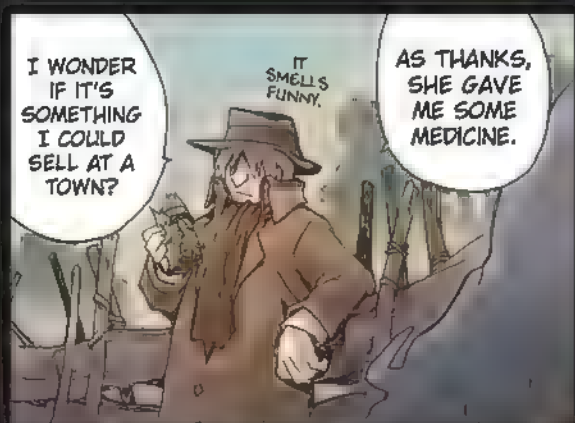
A
WITCH...

...ISN'T
A NAME
ONE CAN
DECIDE
FOR ONE-
SELF.

THEN...
WHAT IS
A WITCH
TO YOU?









THESE STONES...
AH.

THEN
I'M NOT
SO FAR
FROM THE
BORDER.



WHOA!!
WHAT IS
THAT!?



BUT
I'VE BEEN
HEARING
GROWLING..
LIKE THAT
OF A BEAST.

SINCE IT'S
BEFORE
WINTER,
PERHAPS
IT'S
HUNGRY?



URGH...
I SMELL
FOOD.

ARE YOU
OKAY!?
CAN YOU
STAND!?

FOOD?
OH, I
HAVE
SOME
CHEESE
I JUST
GOT...



THE ROAD
AROUND
HERE WAS
MISLEAD-
ING.

YOU'RE
ACTUALLY
IN BETTER
SHAPE
THAN I
THOUGHT

I HAD
TO STOP
MY BIKE
MANY
TIMES.

WHY
WERE YOU
ON THE
GROUND??



WHERE'D
THEY GO?

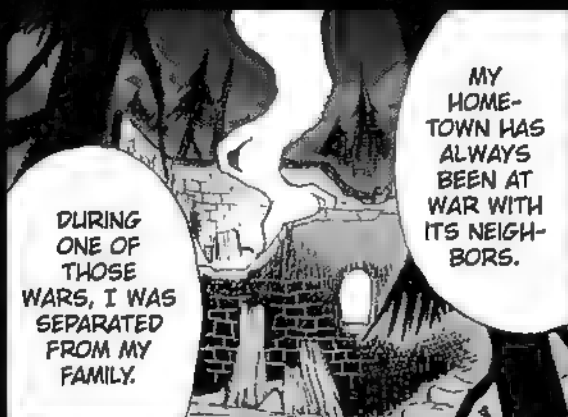
NIJUKU
SANTU



I KEPT
STOPPING,
THINKING
THEY WERE
SILVER
COINS.

THERE'RE
SO MANY
STONES
LYING
AROUND
HERE.

I'LL GIVE
THEM TO YOU
AS A TOKEN
OF APPRE-
CIATION.



DURING ONE OF THOSE WARS, I WAS SEPARATED FROM MY FAMILY.

MY HOME-TOWN HAS ALWAYS BEEN AT WAR WITH ITS NEIGH-BORS.



IT'S OKAY.

I'M REALLY SORRY.

OUR TWO LITTLE ones are so greedy...



I DON'T EVEN REMEMBER HOW MANY YEARS IT'S BEEN.

WHEN I CAME BACK, I FOUND OUT MY WIFE AND CHILD WERE MISSING AND LEFT ON A JOURNEY TO FIND THEM.

I WAS SENT TO THE BATTLE-FIELD AS A SOLDIER.



NO, I'M A TRAV-ELER.

Are you from around here?

I'M SEARCH-ING AS I TRAVEL.



...HOLDING ONTO THE TINY HOPE THAT MY FAMILY MIGHT ALSO HAVE RETURNED.

SO I THOUGHT I SHOULD HEAD BACK...

BUT I HEARD A RUMOR THAT THE WAR HAD ENDED AND MY HOME-TOWN HAD CALMED DOWN.



WELL, SEARCHING FOR MY WIFE AND CHILD.

SEARCH-ING!?

I see.



WELL, THAT'S FINE AS LONG AS THE TWO ARE HAPPY.

SEN.

THERE'S ALSO THE possibility that the wife already returned and found a new husband.



JUST A POT MOCKING A KETTLE.

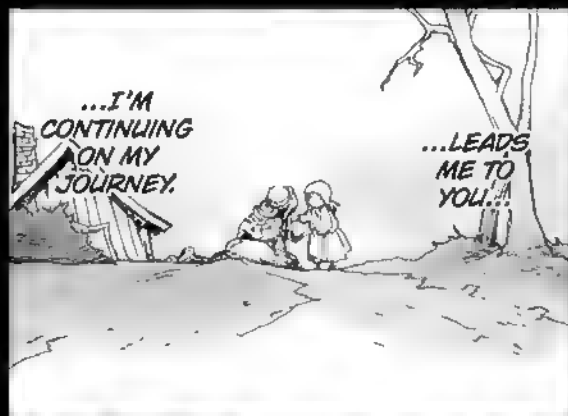
WHAT DOES SEN MEAN?

All men are like travelers, seeking their dreams and freedom.

Don't regret your past mistakes, sir.

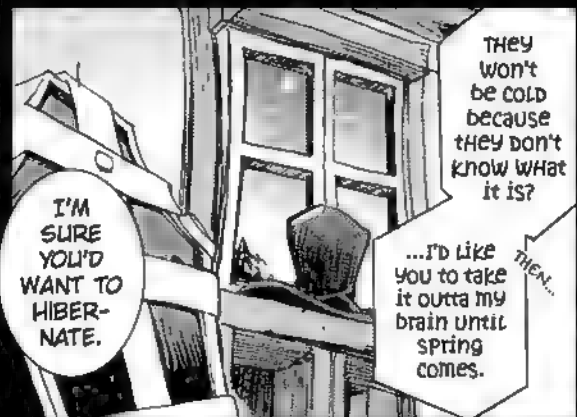


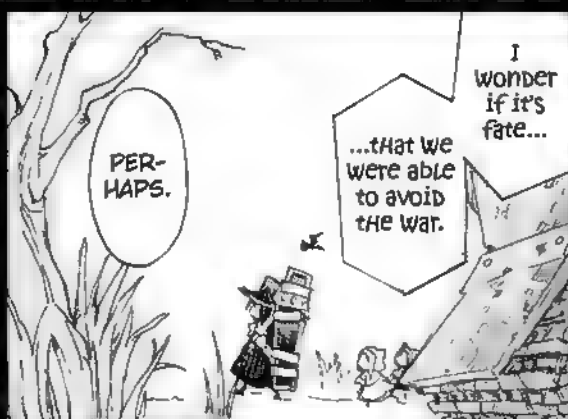














I'M GOING TO SLEEP EARLY.

MY HANDS AND FEET DIDN'T MOVE AS WELL FROM THE COLD TODAY.

You're getting weaker to the cold by the year.



LET'S HEAD FOR THAT CHURCH OVER THERE.

It's already so dark.

THIS IS A HASSLE DURING WINTER.

AND YOU GUYS ON FOOT ARE SLOWER.



ARE YOU GONNA TELL US A STORY?

KURO-CHAN! KURO-CHAN!



WHAT A LARGE HOUSE.

There's no one here.

I guess we can spend the night.

WHAT IS THIS PLACE?!



SURE.

COME HERE.



YEAH, IT WAS ON MY MIND.

OH? IS THAT THE...

THIS AREA IS CLOSE TO HIS HOME.

...stone you got from the traveler?

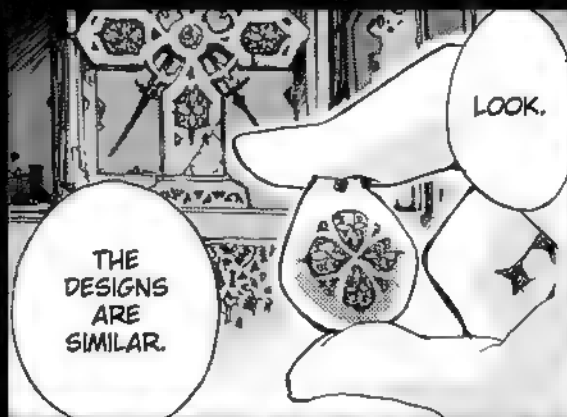


WE DON'T REMEMBER!!

WHERE DID I STOP LAST TIME?

IT WAS THE STORY ABOUT THE PRINCE WHO WAS TURNED INTO A FROG.

YOU DON'T?



LOOK.

THE DESIGNS ARE SIMILAR.





OUCH!



BUT HE
WAS HIDDEN
BY THE
BOMBING AND
THE CLOUD
OF DUST, SO
I DON'T
KNOW WHAT
HAPPENED
TO HIM.

HE PUSHED
US OUT OF
HARM'S
WAY AT
THE LAST
SECOND TO
SAVE US.



IT
HURTS.

NIJUKU?

WHAT'S
WRONG,
LITTLE
GIRL!?

MY EARS
ARE
STINGING.



HE WAS
SHOUTING
SOMETHING
AT THE
END...

...I
SEE.

...BUT I
COULDN'T
UNDER-
STAND IT.



!?

SHOW
IT TO
ME.

IS IT
FROST-
BITE?



IF YOU
REMEMBER
IT, PLEASE
TELL ME.
I'D LIKE
TO TELL
HIS FAMILY
ONE DAY.

UM, IT
WAS...



Kuro!?

where
are you
going!?



...WHAT?



Calm
down,
Kuro.

or
else...



Hey!!
wait,
KURO!!

What's
going
on!?



SPLAT

URGH...



What!?
don't be
stupid...

I'M
GOING
TO LOOK
FOR THAT
MAN.

I DON'T
CARE IF I
FIND HIS
CORPSE.
I NEED TO
MAKE SURE.



WHY...

...DID
HE...



...KNOW
MY MOTHER
AND MY NAME
...!?





...KURO-
CHAN
WILL
ALWAYS...

IF WE
SAY
THIS...

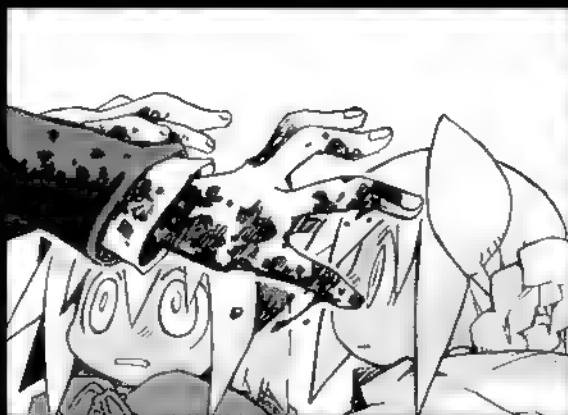
BECAUSE
WE
KNOW.



...THAT
IT WAS
"COLD."

AND
KURO-
CHAN
SAID
QUIETLY...

...THROW
HER ARMS
OPEN WIDE
FOR US.



...FOR
A LONG,
LONG
TIME.

AND SHE
DIDN'T
WAKE
UP...

KURO-
CHA?



THANK YOU FOR READING THE THIRD VOLUME OF
SHOULDER-A-COFFIN KURO.

I TOOK A LONG BREAK, AND IT CAUSED A LOT OF
TROUBLE FOR EVERYONE INVOLVED, INCLUDING THE
READERS. I WOULD LIKE TO TAKE THIS OPPORTUNITY
TO GIVE MY SINCEREST APOLOGIES.

KURO IS AT A TURNING POINT IN HER JOURNEY. IT
WOULD MAKE ME HAPPY IF YOU COULD CONTINUE TO
WATCH OVER HER.

SATOKO KIYODUKI

"It's because
you say carefree
things like that
and take a break
from the series
that we lost
another reader,
Kuro-chan."

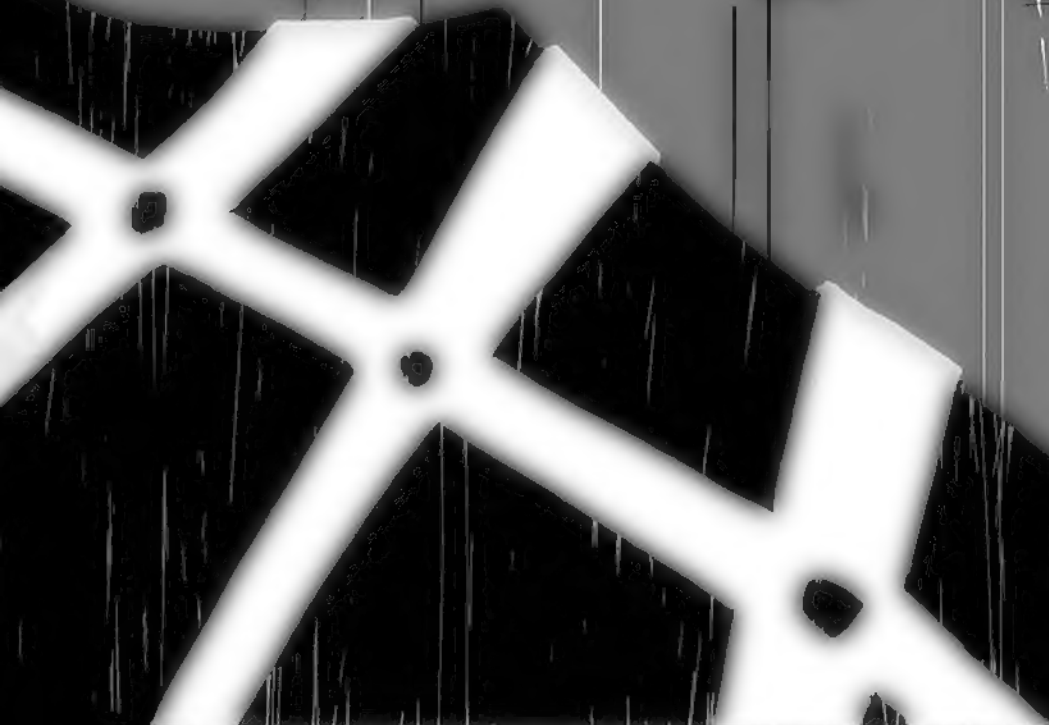
"Everyone is like
a traveler who
is searching for
happiness."

加賀

KERCHUNK

シズ

KERCHUNK



Satoko
Kiyuduki

shoulder-a-coffin

"kuro" vol. 3



"It's because
you say carefree
things like that
and take a break
from the series
that we lost
another reader,
Kuro-chan."

"Everyone is like
a traveler who
is searching for
happiness."



shoulder-a-coffin

Satoko
Kiyuduki

vol. 3

"kuro



SHOULDER-A-COFFIN KURO ③

SATOKO KIYUDUKI

Translation: Satsuki Yamashita

Lettering: Lys Blakeslee

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is coincidental.

HITSUGI KATSUGI NO KURO ~KAICHU TABINOWA~ Vol. 3 © 2012
Satoko Kiyuduki. All rights reserved. First published in Japan in 2012 by HOUBUNSHA CO., LTD, Tokyo. English translation rights in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom arranged with HOUBUNSHA CO., LTD. through Tuttle-Mori Agency, Inc., Tokyo.

Translation © 2012 by Hachette Book Group, Inc.

All rights reserved. In accordance with the U.S. Copyright Act of 1976, the scanning, uploading, and electronic sharing of any part of this book without the permission of the publisher is unlawful piracy and theft of the author's intellectual property. If you would like to use material from the book (other than for review purposes), prior written permission must be obtained by contacting the publisher at permissions@hbgusa.com. Thank you for your support of the author's rights.

Yen Press
Hachette Book Group
237 Park Avenue, New York, NY 10017

www.HachetteBookGroup.com
www.YenPress.com

Yen Press is an imprint of Hachette Book Group, Inc. The Yen Press name and logo are trademarks of Hachette Book Group, Inc.

The publisher is not responsible for websites (or their content) that are not owned by the publisher.

First Yen Press ebook Edition: February 2014

ebook ISBN: 978-0-316-41000-7

App ISBN: 978-0-316-41004-5